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## The Domestic Violence Industry

*This article, published in August 2016, was one of the most difficult and significant pieces I have ever written. Challenging the misinformation on domestic violence being promoted by our key organisations, it took many months to prepare, with every statistic checked by relevant bodies and experts. The article featured prominently in an unsuccessful unfair dismissal case this year before the Fair Work Tribunal in Perth after relationship counsellor Rob Tiller was forced out of his job with Relationships Australia for posting it on his private Facebook page.*

Eva Solberg is a Swedish politician, a proud feminist who holds an important post as chair of the Moderate Women's party. In 2015 she was presented with her government's latest strategy for combating domestic violence. Like similar reports across the world, this strategy assumes the only way to tackle domestic violence is through teaching misogynist men (and boys) to behave themselves.

The Swedish politician spat the dummy. Writing on the news site Nyheter24, Eva Solberg took issue with her government's "tired gendered analysis" which argues that eradicating sexism is the solution to the problem of domestic violence. She explained her reasoning: "We know through extensive practice and experience that attempts to solve the issue through this kind of analysis have failed. And they failed precisely because violence is not and never has been a gender issue."

Solberg challenged the government report's assumption that there is a guilty sex and an innocent one. "Thanks to extensive research in the field, both at the national and international level, we now know with great certainty that this breakdown by sex is simply not true."

Solberg made reference to the world's largest research database on intimate partner violence, the Partner Abuse State of Knowledge project, (PASK) which summarized over 1700 scientific papers on the topic. She concluded that her government's report was based on misinformation about family violence and that, contrary to the report's one-sided view of men as the only perpetrators, many children are experiencing a very different reality: "We must recognize the fact that domestic violence, in at least half of its occurrence, is carried out by female perpetrators."

One of the key patterns that emerged from the PASK, explained Solberg, is that violence in the family is an inherited generational problem and children learn from watching the violence of both their parents. "To know this and then continue to ignore the damage done to the children who are today subjected to violence is a huge social betrayal," Solberg concluded. "The road to a solution for this social problem is hardly to stubbornly continue to feed the patient with more of the same medicine that has already been tried for decades."

There's a certain irony that this happened in Sweden, the utopia for gender equality which is the last place you'd expect misogyny to be blamed for a major social evil. But despite being world-leaders in gender equality (as shown by the 2014 World Economic Forum's global gender gap index) the Nordic women experience the worst physical or sexual violence in the EU. Given this inconvenient truth it seems quite extraordinary that for decades the gendered analysis of domestic violence has retained its grip on Sweden – as it has in Western countries around the world, including Australia.

No one would deny that it was a great achievement to have men's violence towards women fully acknowledged and take critical steps to protect vulnerable women and ensure their safety. But it has been shocking to watch this morph into a world-wide domestic violence industry determined to ignore evidence showing the complexities of violence in the home and avoid prevention strategies that would tackle the real risk factors underpinning this vital social issue.

Here, too, we are witnessing Solberg's "huge social betrayal" by denying the reality of the violence being witnessed by many Australian children. Just look at the bizarre \$30M television campaign which the federal government launched in 2016 which starts with a little boy slamming a door in a little girl's face. A series of vignettes follow, all about innocent females cowering from nasty males. The whole thing is based on the erroneous notion that domestic violence is caused by disrespect for women – precisely the type of "tired gender analysis" that Eva Solberg has so thoroughly discredited. Yet our government spent at least \$700,000 funding for research and production of this campaign – just one example of the shocking misuse of the hundreds of millions of dollars that Malcolm Turnbull regularly boasts our government is spending on domestic violence.

Last year, Liberal Democrat Senator David Leyonhjelm repeatedly grilled bureaucrats in Senate Estimates committee, seeking evidence to support the government's claim that addressing gender equity is key to tackling domestic violence. They failed dismally to come up with any such proof<sup>1</sup>.

Our key organizations all sing from the same songbook, regularly distorting statistics to present only one part of this complex story. "Up to one quarter of young people in Australia have witnessed an incident of physical or domestic violence against their mother or stepmother," wrote Adam Graycar, a former director of the Australian Institute of Criminology, in an introduction to a 2001 paper, *Young Australians and Domestic Violence*, a brief overview of the much larger *Young People and Domestic Violence* study.

Somehow Graycar failed to mention that while 23 per cent of young people were aware of domestic violence against their mothers or step-mothers, an almost identical proportion (22 per cent) of young people were aware of domestic violence against their fathers or step-fathers by their mothers or step-mothers – as shown in the same study<sup>2</sup>.

This type of deliberate omission is everywhere, with most of our bureaucracies downplaying statistics which demonstrate women's role in family violence and beating up evidence of male aggression.

How often have we been told we face an "epidemic" of domestic violence? It's simply not true. Most Australian women are lucky enough to actually live in a peaceful society where the men in their lives treat them well. The official data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show violence against women has decreased over the twenty year period it has been studied, with the proportion of adult women experiencing physical violence from their current male partners in the preceding year down from 2.6 per cent in 1996 to 0.8 per cent in 2012<sup>3</sup>. (Violence from ex-partners dropped from 3.3 to 0.7 per cent)<sup>4</sup>.

"There's no evidence that we're in the middle of an epidemic of domestic violence," says Don Weatherburn the well-respected director of the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, confirming these figures from national surveys carried out by the ABS provide the best data on domestic violence in the country<sup>5</sup>. (This fact was grudgingly acknowledged by one of the bureaucrats being grilled in Senate Estimates by Leyonhjelm.)

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CX\\_jFIP1oM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CX_jFIP1oM)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tldOXwc0dh8>

<sup>2</sup> The study also determined mother's violence was not carried out in self-defence.

<sup>3</sup> In 2016 the proportion was still 0.8%

<sup>4</sup> By 2016, physical violence from ex-partners had dropped to 0.5%.

<sup>5</sup> Australia was recently named the safest country in the world for women, according to analysis by consultancy New World Wealth in its 2018 Global Wealth Migration Review.

Weatherburn adds that in NSW “serious forms of domestic assault, such as assault inflicting grievous bodily harm, have actually come down by 11 per cent over the last 10 years.”

The astonishing and very welcome news is that the 2012 statistics from the ABS Personal Safety Survey show only 1.06 per cent of women are actually physically assaulted by their partner or ex-partner each year in Australia<sup>6</sup>. (This figure is derived from the 2012 PSS and published in this ANROWS Horizons report<sup>7</sup>. The rate is obtained by dividing cell B9 in Table 19 (93,400) by the total female residential population aged 18 years and over [8,735,400])

One in a hundred women experiencing this physical violence from their partners is obviously a matter of great concern. But this low percentage is very different from the usual figures being trotted out. You’ll never find the figure of 1.06 per cent mentioned by any of the domestic violence organizations in this country. Their goal is to fuel the flames, to promote an alarmist reaction with the hope of attracting ever greater funding for the cause.

What we hear from them is one in three women are victims of violence. But that’s utterly misleading because it doesn’t just refer to domestic violence. These statistics are also taken from the Personal Safety Survey but refer to the proportion of adult women who have experienced any type of physical violence at all (or threat of violence.) So, we’re not just talking about violence by a partner, or violence in the home but any aggressive incident even involving a perfect stranger. Like an altercation with an aggressive shopping trolley driver or an incident of road rage.

That’s partly how the figure inflates to one in three but it also doesn’t even refer to what’s happening now because these figures include lifetime incidents for adult women – so with our seventy year-olds the violence could have taken place over 50 years ago. And the equivalent figure for men is worse — one in two<sup>8</sup>.

As for the most horrific crimes, where domestic violence ends in homicide, we are constantly told that domestic violence kills one woman every week. That’s roughly true – according to Australian Institute of Criminology figures, one female is killed by an intimate partner or ex-partner every nine days<sup>9</sup>. One man is killed by his partner approximately every 30 days. So it is important to acknowledge that male violence is more likely to result in injury or death than female violence towards a partner. This is inevitable due the average man’s greater size and strength.

But the fact remains that almost a quarter (23.1 per cent) of victims of intimate partner homicide are male<sup>10</sup> – and we hardly ever hear about these deaths. It is not serving our society well to downplay the fact that female violence can also be lethal, towards men and particularly towards children - females account for over half of murders of children (52%)

These are all still alarming statistics but here too there is good news. Domestic homicides are decreasing. The number of victims of intimate partner homicide dropped by almost a third (28 per

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<sup>6</sup> ABS Personal Safety Survey data shows this increased to 1.18% in 2016, a minimal change.

<sup>7</sup> <https://mentoo.com.au/violence-against-women-in-australia>

<sup>8</sup> That dropped to around 40 per cent in 2016.

<sup>9</sup> The latest Institute of Criminology figures report that there were 99 female victims of intimate partner homicide over a two-year period in 2012 – 2014. A man is now killed by his partner every 27 days, 27 over the 2 year period 2012-14.

<sup>10</sup> More recent statistics suggest that 21.4% of intimate partner homicide victims are male.

cent) between 1989–90 and 2010–12<sup>11 12</sup>, according to data supplied by the Australian Institute of Criminology.

Professor Chris Lloyd is one of a growing number of Australian academics concerned at the misrepresentation of domestic violence statistics in this country. An expert in statistics and data management at the Melbourne Business School, Lloyd confirms our best source of data, the ABS's Personal Safety Survey, clearly demonstrates domestic violence is decreasing.

He too says it's wrong to suggest there's an epidemic of domestic violence in this country. "Many of the quoted statistics around domestic violence are exaggerated or incorrect. Contrary to popular belief and commentary, rates of intimate partner violence are not increasing," says Lloyd adding that while he understands the emotional reaction people have to this crime, "emotion is no basis for public policy".

He's concerned that Australia media so often publishes misinformation – like a 2016 *The Age* editorial which repeated the falsehood that domestic violence is the major cause of death or illness for adult women in Victoria. (As I explained in the previous chapter on the Demonization of Men, it doesn't even make the list of the top ten such causes). The *Age* ignored Lloyd's efforts to correct their mistake, ditto his concern about erroneous media reports which inflate domestic violence figures by using police crime statistics – a notoriously unreliable source.

As Don Weatherburn points out, it's very difficult to determine whether swelling numbers of reported incidents to police reflect any increase at all in actual crime. "It may simply be a tribute to the excellent job that has been done to raise awareness of DV, encouraging women to report, and efforts to get the police to respond properly," he says. Weatherburn believes that the slight (5.7%) increase in reports of domestic assault in NSW over the last 10 years could be due to an increase in victim willingness to report domestic assault and points to the 11 per cent drop over that time in serious forms of domestic assault, such as assault inflicting grievous bodily harm, as a more reliable picture of the trend in domestic violence.

Weatherburn adds that valid comparisons of state police figures on assault are impossible because each police force has a different approach to recording assault. But in many states the goal posts have also shifted – the explosion in police records is also due to recent expansions in the definition of family violence to include not just physical abuse but also threats of violence, psychological, emotional, economic and social abuse. Look at Western Australia, where this changed definition was introduced in 2004. That year WA police recorded 17,000 incidents of violence but by 2012 this had almost tripled (45,000). Other states report similar trends due to these expanded definitions.

"If a woman turns up to a police station claiming her man has yelled at her, the chances are that she'll end up with a police report and well on her way to obtaining an Apprehended Violence Order (AVO) which puts her in a very powerful position," says former WA Law Reform Commissioner Augusto Zimmermann, who explains that AVOs can be used to force men to leave their homes and deny them contact with their children. Often men are caught in police proceedings and evicted from their homes by orders that are issued without any evidence of legal wrongdoing.

"It is a frightening reality that here in Australia a perfectly innocent citizen stands to lose his home, his family, his reputation, as a result of unfounded allegations. This is happening to men every day as consequent of domestic violence laws which fail to require the normal standards of proof and

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<sup>11</sup> When the latest, 2012-2014 figures are included, the drop isn't so dramatic. There's been a 24 per cent decrease over the period. <https://mentoo.com.au/homicide-in-australia>

<sup>12</sup> Victims of Domestic or Family Homicide: <https://mentoo.com.au/victims-of-domestic-or-family-homicide>

presumptions of innocence,” says Zimmermann, adding that he’s not talking about genuine cases of violent men who terribly abuse their wives and children, but “law-abiding people who have lost their parental and property rights without the most basic requirements of the rule of law.”<sup>13</sup>

The growing trend for AVO’s to be used for tactical purposes in Family Law disputes is also pushing up police records of domestic violence, “Rather than being motivated by legitimate concerns about feeling safe, a woman can make an application to AVO simply because she was advised by lawyers to look for any reason to apply for such an order when facing a family law dispute,” says Zimmermann who served on a WA government inquiry into legal issues and domestic violence.

A survey of NSW magistrates found 90 per cent agreed that AVO’s were being used as a divorce tactic. Research by Family Law Professor Patrick Parkinson and colleagues from the University of Sydney revealed lawyers suggesting that clients obtain AVO’s, explaining to them that verbal and emotional abuse was enough to do the trick

The bottom line is police reports tell us little and the ABS Personal Safety Survey remains our best source of data showing the true picture of domestic violence. But there’s one more vital fact revealed by that survey that rarely ever surfaces – that men accounted for one in three victims of current partner violence<sup>14</sup>.

You’ll never find this figure mentioned on OurWatch, one of our major domestic violence organizations, annually attracting government grants of up to two million. In 2016 when Lucy Turnbull became an ambassador to OurWatch she was welcomed by OurWatch’s CEO Mary Barry thanking the ambassadors for “engaging Australians to call out disrespect and violence towards women and advocating for gender equality” which she said was “exactly what the evidence says is needed to end the epidemic.”

OurWatch staff spend their time writing policy documents and running conferences all firmly locked into the gender equity framework. The site’s facts and figures pages include lists of cherry-picked statistics about violence against women but male victims are dismissed by simply stating that the “overwhelming majority of acts of domestic violence are perpetrated by men against women”.

There’s an interesting parallel here. As it happens this one-in-three ratio is very similar to the proportions of women to men committing suicide. In males 2.8% of all deaths in 2014 were attributed to suicide<sup>15</sup>, while the rate for females was 0.9%. Imagine the public outcry if the smaller number of female suicides was used to justify committing the entire suicide prevention budget to men. So how come all our government organizations are getting away with doing just that with the hundreds of millions being spent on domestic violence?

According to one of Australia’s leading experts on couple relationships, Kim Halford, a professor of clinical psychology at the University of Queensland, most family violence does not fit the picture most of us think of when we imagine domestic violence – a violent man severely beating up his partner in order to control her. Such violence makes up less than 1% of family violence.

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<sup>13</sup> See the video I made talking to the brave Augusto Zimmermann about his work.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLai47ieB08&t=834s>

<sup>14</sup> The 2016 Personal Safety Survey showed that figure had increased further, with men accounting for almost 40% of victims of current partner violence over the 12 month period, and 47.7% of victims of current partner emotional abuse

<sup>15</sup> In 2016, 2.62% of male deaths and 0.93% of female deaths were attributed to suicide.

The vast majority of family violence is two-way aggression with international research showing about a third of couples having a go at each other – pushing, slapping, shoving or worse. Given the shame and stigma associated with being a male victim of family violence it is not surprising that men downplay these experiences in victim surveys such as Australia’s PSS. It’s only when men and women are asked about *perpetrating* violence that the two-way violence emerges, with women readily admitting to researchers that they are very actively involved and often instigate this type of “couple violence”. “Thirty years of international research consistently shows that women and men are violent towards each other at about the same rate,” confirms Halford.

As one example, two major meta-analysis studies by psychology professor John Archer from the University of Central Lancashire found that women were more likely than men to report acts like pushing, slapping or throwing something at their partner. Archer pointed out that women are more likely to be injured as a result of the couple violence although there was still a substantial minority of injured male victims.

This two-way violence wasn’t what most researchers expected to find, admits a leading researcher in this area, Professor Terrie Moffit from Duke University. “We asked the girls questions like “Have you hit your partner? Have you thrown your partner across the room? Have you used a knife on your partner? I thought we were wasting our time asking these questions but they said yes, and they said yes in just the same numbers as the boys did.” Terrie Moffit’s work with young people was part of the world-renowned Dunedin longitudinal study back in the 1990’s which recently featured on the SBS series *Predict My Future*. The Dunedin researchers like Moffit are no longer willing to speak publicly about their important research after receiving such a hostile reception to their findings<sup>16</sup>.

It is telling that Australia has not conducted any of the large-scale surveys focussing on perpetrating violence likely to reveal the two-way pattern shown elsewhere. But gender symmetry did emerge in violence studies by Professor Kim Halford which focussed on couples at the start of their relationships, newly-wed couples and couples expecting a child together. Even with these early relationships about a quarter of the women admit they have been violent towards their partners – just as many as the men.

Halford suggests that perhaps three quarters of a million children every year in Australia are witnessing both parents engaged in domestic violence. Only small numbers see the severe violence we hear so much about, what the feminists call “intimate terrorism” where a perpetrator uses violence in combination with a variety of other coercive tactics in order to take control over their partner, but as Halford points out, even less severe couple violence is not trivial. “Children witnessing any form of family violence, including couple violence suffer high rates of mental health problems and the children are more likely to be violent themselves. Couple violence is also a very strong predictor of relationship break up, which has profound effects on adults and their children,” he says.

The 2001 Young People and Domestic Violence study mentioned earlier was national research involving 5,000 young Australians between 12 and 20. This found ample evidence that children are witnessing this two-way parental couple violence with 14.4 per cent witnessing ‘couple violence’, 9 per cent witnessing male to female violence only, and 7.8 per cent witnessing female to male violence only – which means about one in four young Australians have this detrimental start to their lives. The report found the most damage to children occurred when they witnessed both parents involved in violence.

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<sup>16</sup> My video – Monstrous Lies about Domestic Violence – includes an extract from the SBS television show, featuring Terrie Moffit speaking about this research. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1-l8AttyDc&t=8s>

It is often claimed that women only hit in self-defence in response to male violence but Halford points out the evidence shows that is just not true. "In fact, one of the strongest risk factors for a woman being hit by a male partner is her hitting that male partner. It's absolutely critical that we tackle couple violence if we really want to stop this escalation into levels of violence which cause women serious injury," he says. Of course, the impact on children is the other important reason to make couple violence a major focus.

Naturally none of this is mentioned in the section on "what drives violence against women" in the official government framework<sup>17</sup> promoted by all our key domestic violence bodies. Nor is there any proper attention paid to other proven, evidence-based risk factors like alcohol and drug abuse, poverty, mental illness. The only officially sanctioned risk factor for domestic violence in this country is gender inequality. "Other factors interact with or reinforce gender inequality to contribute to increased frequency and severity of violence against women, but do not drive violence in and of themselves," is the only grudging acknowledgement in the framework that other factors might be at play.

During hearings of the Victorian Royal Commission into Domestic Family Violence in 2016, Australian experts in alcohol abuse and mental illness spoke out about this blatant disregard of the forty years of research which speaks to these complexities. "It is simplistic and misleading to say that domestic violence is caused by patriarchal attitudes," said Professor James Ogloff, a world renowned mental health expert.

"A sole focus on the gendered nature of family violence which labels men as the perpetrators and women as the victims and which identifies gender inequity as the principal 'cause' of family violence is problematic on a number of levels," said Professor Peter Miller principal research fellow and co-director of the violence prevention group at Deakin University.

Professor Miller was involved in a systematic review of longitudinal studies involving predictors of family violence which identified childhood experiences with abuse and violence, particularly in families with problem alcohol use, as key predictors of adult involvement in domestic violence. Miller has encountered obstruction in both conducting and publishing research into the role of drugs and alcohol in family violence.

The evidence is there about the complexities of domestic violence but on an official level no one is listening. The reason is simple. The deliberate distortion of this important social issue is all about feminists refusing to give up hard-won turf. Ogloff spelt this out to the Commission when he explained that the Victorian family violence sector feared that "recognising other potential causes of violence could cause a shift in funding away from programmes directed at gender inequity."<sup>18</sup>

In the mid-1970s an important feminist figure was invited to Australia to visit our newly established women's refuges. Erin Pizzey was the founder of Britain's first refuge, a woman praised around the world for her pioneering work helping women escape from violence. On the way to Australia Pizzey travelled to New Zealand where she spoke out about her changing views. She'd learnt through

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<sup>17</sup> <https://mentoo.com.au/change-the-story>

<sup>18</sup> Despite Miller's and Ogloff's witness statements, the rhetoric in the Royal Commission report exposes a strong feminist bias. The report endorses the prioritisation of female and child victims (p. 1), includes 'gender inequality' and 'attitudes towards women' that are 'rooted in power imbalances' and 'reinforced by gender norms and stereotypes' as key causes of family violence (p. 2) and reveals an acute disproportion of female perspectives in the commission's investigative processes (p. 4). <https://mentoo.com.au/Victorian-Royal-Commission>



dealing with violent women in her own refuge that violence was not a gender issue and that it was important to tackle the complexities of violence to properly address the issue.

Pizzey quickly attracted the wrath of the women's movement in Britain, attracting death threats which forced her for a time to leave the country. "The feminists seized upon domestic violence as the cause they needed to attract more money and supporters at a time when the first flush of enthusiasm for their movement was starting to wane. Domestic violence was perfect for them – the just cause that no one dared challenge. It led to a worldwide million-dollar industry, a huge cash cow supporting legions of bureaucrats and policy makers," said Pizzey.

In Pizzey's New Zealand press interviews she challenged the gender inequality view of violence, suggesting tackling violence in the home required dealing with the real roots of violence, like intergeneration exposure to both male and female aggression. News travelled fast. By the time Pizzey was set to leave for the Australian leg of the trip she was persona non grata with the feminists running our refuges. Her visit to this country was cancelled.

That was 1976. Since then the party-line gendered view of domestic violence has totally held sway, dissenters are silenced, evidence about the true issues underlying this complex issue are ignored. And the huge cash cow supporting our blinkered domestic violence industry becomes ever more bloated.