

Launch: Attitudes towards violence against women and gender equality among Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders: Findings from the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey

Notes from the presentation by Dr Heather Nancarrow & Dr Kyllie Cripps
ANROWS

Dr Heather Nancarrow (Heather) opened the presentation by explaining that the National Community Attitudes Survey toward Violence against Women (NCAS) began in 1995. This was a federal initiative which drew on an earlier survey conducted in 1987. The survey is the longest running assessment of community attitudes towards Violence against Women and has been conducted four times. Most recently in 2017 it involved a telephone survey of 17,500 people, with 342 identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. However, Heather emphasised that people from remote communities are under-represented.

The most recent NCAS overall report was published in November 2018 presenting findings on the main areas of investigation- knowledge, attitudes and an intention to act. There were three sub-sample reports exploring the attitudes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Cultural and Linguistically Diverse and young people. The four themes of the questionnaire centred around people's knowledge of violence against women, the second was about attitudes toward gender equality, the third asked about attitudes toward violence against women and the fourth asked about intentions to act if violence against women was witnessed.

The implications for policy and practice include those which will result from addressing gaps in knowledge, particularly in relation to gender equity, bystander action, the use of intoxicants, the importance of consent and responses by police and support services. These actions will hopefully reduce the impact of violence against women in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities.

In response to questions, Heather said there is a need for qualitative research in addition to the statistics in this report, and Dr Kyllie Cripps (Kyllie) said there is a need to hear the stories from victims, including men. Heather also spoke about the differences in the dynamics and perceptions of family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities, which was not always appreciated in the Family Court system.

Heather concluded by acknowledging the multiple authors involved in collecting and collating the report.

Reference

Cripps, K., Diemer, K., Honey, N., Mickle, J., Morgan, J., Parkes, A., Politoff, V., Powell, A., Stubbs, J., Ward, A., & Webster, K. (2019). *Attitudes towards violence against women and gender equality among Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders: Findings from the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS)* (ANROWS Insights, Issue 03/2019). Sydney: ANROWS.

At a glance: an abridged extract from *Attitudes towards violence against women and gender equality among Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders*

Encouraging findings

Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have good knowledge of key aspects of violence against women, support gender equality and do not endorse attitudes supportive of violence against women. Most would also be concerned if they witnessed abuse and disrespect of women and would take, or would like to take, action.

The survey includes four overall measures (referred to as composite measures). These gauge the overall level of:

- understanding that violence against women can involve non-physical forms of violence and coercion (not just physical violence and forced sex);
- endorsement of gender equality;
- attitudinal support for violence against women; and
- intention to act if witnessing abuse or disrespect of women.

Between 2013 and 2017, there has been an improvement among Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders on the overall measure of attitudes towards violence against women.

While recognising that reporting violence to the police can be troublesome for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls and their families, most respondents nevertheless believe that a report should be made.

Specific areas of concern

Mostly the findings for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sample were similar to those for non-Indigenous Australians. There were no differences between the two samples in any of the four composite measures introduced above.

Attitudes to gender equality were measured in five themes. Of these, the most widely endorsed in both samples reflected the idea that gender inequality is no longer a problem. Attitudes supportive of violence against women were measured in four themes. Of these, the most widely endorsed in both samples were those reflecting the idea that women's reports of violence cannot be trusted.

There was no improvement between 2013 and 2017 in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sample in the overall measures of understanding of violence against women and attitudes to gender equality.

This is in contrast to the national sample in which there was improvement in both measures.

There were a small number of individual questions on which there were differences between the samples. People in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sample were less likely to agree that domestic violence was mainly or more often perpetrated by men and more likely to agree that men and women were equally likely to suffer physical harm as the result of such violence. Between 2013 and 2017 there was a decline in the proportion of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders recognising that domestic violence is perpetrated mainly by men or men more often (similar to the national sample). Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders were also more likely than non-Indigenous Australians to:

- agree that 'A man should never admit when others have hurt his feelings' and that 'It is embarrassing for a man to have a job that is usually filled by a woman' and
- excuse violence against women if either the victim or perpetrator were affected by alcohol or drugs at the time.

Within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sample, men are more likely than women to endorse negative attitudes towards violence against women and gender equality. Other groups within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sample that are more likely to endorse negative attitudes towards violence against women are those aged 65 years and older, people with secondary education or less, and those living outside of a major city.