Dealing with backlash
This work was funded by the Victorian Government as part of the Workplace Equality and Respect Project led by Our Watch.

Our Watch 2017
Published by Our Watch
GPO Box 24229, Melbourne VIC 3001
www.ourwatch.org.au

Acknowledgement of Country: Our Watch acknowledges the traditional owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
### Workplace Equality and Respect key tools

- Workplace Equality and Respect Standards
- Workplace Equality and Respect Implementation Guide
- Workplace Equality and Respect Self-Assessment Tool
- Workplace Equality and Respect Key Progress Indicators
- Workplace Equality and Respect Staff Survey

**Practice guidance:** Engaging leaders

**Practice guidance:** Communications guide

**Practice guidance:** Dealing with backlash

**Practice guidance:** Equality and respect for all women - an intersectional approach

**Practice guidance:** Reducing risk in workplace initiatives to prevent violence against women

**Practice guidance:** Responding to disclosures

**Practice guidance:** Understanding your rights in the workplace and Victorian anti-discrimination law

**Practice guidance:** Workplace responses to staff who perpetrate violence

**Practice guidance:** Workplace gender equality and the law

**Practice guidance:** Workplace policies to support equality and respect

**Practice guidance:** Working in rural, regional and remote workplaces to prevent violence against women

**Practice guidance:** Workplace support for staff who experience family violence
This guide aims to help you by providing:

- an overview of what backlash is and how it often presents itself in workplaces that are promoting gender equality
- strategies to prepare for, address and reduce backlash in your workplace
- information you need to respond confidently to backlash, including:
  - advice for dealing with backlash on social media
  - suggested responses to common difficult questions.

Backlash is a normal part of the change process – when things change, many people’s response is to push back because they feel uncertain, threatened or disagree with the change being proposed.

If you’re leading initiatives in your workplace to prevent violence against women, thinking about backlash as part of your planning will support you to reduce risk, increase engagement and make progress.

What is backlash and what does it look like?

Backlash is a term for the resistance, hostility or aggression which can arise as a reaction to change that an individual or group thinks is unnecessary or unjust.

When working to prevent violence against women, backlash is essentially any effort or behaviour which seeks to halt change and revert to status quo gender relations, re-establishing male privilege and power.

In workplace gender equality or violence prevention initiatives, backlash and resistance can come from leaders and staff at all levels of the organisation or from stakeholders in the wider community.
Backlash often presents as:

- open hostility or aggression about the workplace’s commitment and efforts to promote gender equality and prevent violence against women
- attempts to discredit evidence about gender inequality or the prevalence, severity and gendered nature of violence against women
- complaints about the unfairness of actions and strategies put in place to support women’s career advancement
- ignoring or trivialising complaints or allegations of gender-based discrimination and harassment in the workplace
- undermining, trivialising or de-prioritising initiatives and actions aimed at increasing gender equality
- justifying existing workplace gender inequality and refusing to investigate reasons for inequality and develop strategies for change
- refusal to participate in training or being distracted or disruptive in training or consultation sessions.

**Why does backlash happen?**

Challenges to established ideas about the roles of men and women are often resisted by those who strongly support gendered norms and see them as traditional or natural.

Because prevention of violence against women strategies and initiatives begin to challenge existing attitudes, behaviours and social norms, those who wish to maintain the status quo are likely to feel resentful, threatened or anxious. As such,
these initiatives are often met with deliberate and intensive efforts to maintain existing gender norms and structures. These efforts aim to slow or reverse progress towards gender equality.

Backlash can have the effect of hindering or reversing progress towards violence prevention and gender equality\(^1\) and in some cases backlash can lead to an increase in violence itself.\(^2\) This is rare and more often backlash presents itself in the ways outlined on page 5.

The existence of backlash should not deter workplaces from pursuing gender equality. In fact, backlash can be understood as an inevitable response to challenges to male power, control and status, and is often interpreted as a sign that such challenges are being effective.\(^3\)

**Strategies to address and reduce backlash**

Involve the whole workplace in change to support the prevention of violence against women. All staff should be genuinely engaged to create incentives for change and to establish a critical mass of new thinking.

Backlash has the potential to impact significantly on the engagement and commitment of leaders and staff across the organisation, so it is important to plan for it from the beginning.

This section outlines practical strategies to support you to address and reduce backlash in your workplace.

---


Practical ways to address backlash

1. Engage all staff in the process of organisational change. ✓

2. Identify possible sites of backlash. ✓

3. Make sure key staff have the knowledge and skills they need to respond to backlash. ✓

4. Proactively communicate and model equality and respect. ✓

1. Engage all staff in the process of organisational change

Workplaces can work to minimise backlash by involving employees, both men and women, in discussion about the process of change.

Remember that backlash and resistance are not only demonstrated by men. Women in the organisation may also hold values and beliefs that are at odds with the promotion of gender equality. You may need to be deliberate about engaging those who you think are likely to be resistant to change or who have already started to show some resistance.

Engaging staff will look different in different organisations and industries but there are three key things that are important to consider regardless of where you work:

Communicate about change

Use communication channels (meetings, emails, intranet etc.) to keep staff informed of upcoming changes and why the organisation thinks they are necessary. Share with staff how the change will benefit individuals, teams, the workplace and the community. Make it clear how the changes or efforts you are making are supported by the values, leadership and decision-making practices in the organisation. This may mean ensuring there is a briefing or training available to staff so they can
understand what drives violence against women and why the workplace is an important space for change.

It is also helpful to let staff know who to speak with about the change process and any behaviour they witness or experience that is not respectful or in line with a commitment to gender equality.

**Provide opportunities for staff and stakeholders to ask questions and give feedback**

A key part of engaging staff is to provide them with opportunities to voice their doubts, anxieties and concerns about workplace change in a safe and constructive environment. One way to support this environment is to have clear organisational commitment to gender equality and to respectful discussions of issues. Another way is to deliberately create opportunities for discussion; for example, during team meetings or training, at lunchtime briefings, holding questions and answer sessions or by providing a clear contact to answer questions privately or via email.

It is important to also consider how you will report back to staff about concerns and anxieties that have been raised and let them know if and how these concerns will be addressed.

**Engage men**

Because the overwhelming majority of violence against women is perpetrated by men, engaging men in violence prevention strategies is critical. Men’s use of violence is driven by gender inequality and reinforced by socially constructed and accepted versions of masculinity. Challenging problematic and harmful ideas about men and their roles in society and in the workplace is therefore an important component of prevention work.⁴

Because these ideas about men’s roles are common, engaging men as allies and partners is an important part of minimising and responding to backlash and resistance. Involving men must involve more than asking them to say ‘no to

---

violence’ – it needs to be about engaging them to understand gender inequality as the driver of violence against women; seeing how it impacts them and their loved ones; and investing time, energy and skills in changing it.

While we need to specifically engage men in organisational change work, women’s empowerment must remain the central idea for any prevention activity. Care must be taken not to reproduce the very gender power imbalances and dynamics that this work is seeking to challenge. For example, one of the risks identified with the increasing involvement of men in prevention is that women may be unintentionally marginalised or their leadership and roles in prevention undervalued or overlooked. Another is that men will be applauded for leading work, while women are the ones behind the scenes making change happen.

Effective strategies to engage men to prevent violence against women will be different in different workplaces but keeping up to date with new research and guidance as it becomes available can support you.

---

2. Identify possible sites of backlash

The potential for backlash and resistance should be considered in all aspects of the work your organisation is doing to promote gender equality to prevent violence against women.

Backlash can come from any quarter; from those who often resist change or from those you thought would support gender equality.

---

Be open to the possibility that backlash might come from unexpected sources, from both men and women, and at different times during the organisational change process. For example, while everyone says they are on board during the initial phases of the work, backlash may occur when you begin to make changes to workplace structures and norms.

Think about how information flows throughout the organisations and who has informal and formal influence on others.

If you can, speak to people in the organisation who have undertaken organisational change work to understand the points of resistance in the organisation more broadly. They might be aware of strategies that were useful in the past to work through the resistance.

**Some questions that might help you identify sites of backlash include:**

- Are there any staff members or teams that have shown resistance to workplace change in the past?
- Who might be most affected by the advancement of gender equality in our workplace?
- Are there sites or teams in our workplace that show more disrespect towards women (for example, a site where it is known that sexist jokes are common)?
- Are there any employees who are known to have used violence in the past?
- Are there any staff or teams who have demonstrated resistance to gender equality and/or strong adherence to gender roles?
- Is there someone in a position of leadership or influence who is known to be against addressing gender inequality and whose influence may have wide reach?

3. **Make sure key staff have the knowledge and skills they need to respond to backlash**

At the beginning of the change process it is important that you identify the most appropriate people within the organisation to deal with backlash when it occurs and who can lead potentially difficult conversations about gender inequality and the need for change.
Staff leading prevention and gender equality work may be the most appropriate people to deal with backlash or it may require people in more senior leadership or management positions. Having more than one person who is responsible for addressing and planning for backlash is important, as it is often a difficult process. It is also important to have a number of people prepared to address backlash because it may not always be directed at those leading the work. For example, it is common for communications staff to be on the receiving end of negative or critical comments, emails or phone calls, so it is useful for someone in the communications team to also be prepared.

Provide key staff with information about the work being done and about the organisation’s commitment to undertaking the work. These staff members need to be clear about how to communicate this with others.

Key staff should also feel confident to respond to critique and questioning about prevention of violence against women. One way to help them prepare for this is to provide them with information, including relevant statistics, so that they can answer questions about gender equality and violence prevention.

This guide includes two factsheets to support you with this:

**Factsheet 1: Managing difficult questions**

**Factsheet 2: Suggested responses to common questions about violence against women**

Our Watch has compiled a list of relevant statistics, available on our website: [Facts and figures](#).

It is also important that key staff, managers and leaders are aware of key workplace policies and legislation regarding gender equality and violence against women. Finally, the workplace needs to be ready to support staff to take action in response to acts of backlash or resistance that contravene workplace policies or current legislation; for example, sending inappropriate images via social media or a manager changing someone’s hours and shifts as a way of punishing them for speaking up.
Ensuring staff welfare

Some forms of backlash, such as heated discussions or disrespectful behaviour, can be distressing for employees, though not necessarily against policy or the law.

It is important that key staff are aware of the distress that can result from backlash and provide support to those who are affected; for example, counselling through their Employee Assistance Program.

It is also important that all staff leading work on gender equality and violence against women are aware of the appropriate referral pathways, in case someone discloses an experience of violence and requests support.

1800RESPECT is the national sexual assault and family and domestic violence counselling line (24 hours).

4. Proactively communicate and model respectful conduct

Organisational commitment

A clearly stated commitment by workplace leaders to preventing violence against women and promoting gender equality and respectful behaviour can be used to counter views and behaviours which undermine the validity of gender equality as an organisational goal.

The statement could read something like this:

“Our commitment to promoting gender equality for the prevention of violence against women is unequivocal, and has the full support of the Board [or other governance structure], and all levels of management within the organisation.”

“In all our work roles and functions, we will demonstrate our commitment to gender equality and respect. We will reject sexism and discriminatory attitudes, and confront resistant or hostile attitudes and behaviours that undermine our efforts to promote gender equality and respect.”
In addition to a positive statement about the workplace commitment to equality and respect, it is also useful to be explicit about what behaviours and practices are unacceptable. This statement might include naming common types of backlash behaviour that are unacceptable, and stating that these behaviours will not be tolerated and will be addressed.

This type of statement can be referenced in a code of conduct and working documents used by key staff undertaking the gender equality and prevention of violence against women work and/or might be communicated by leaders through staff newsletters or all staff email.

The following are examples of statements that could be used:

“We will take responsibility for supporting staff to identify and respond to backlash to our equality and respect work.”

“We will engage respectfully in discussions and conversations about the organisation’s commitment to gender equality for the prevention of violence against women and address any behaviours that are not respectful.”

Managers and leaders need to be informed about what is expected of them in terms of role modelling the organisational commitment to promoting gender equality for the prevention of violence against women, and to appropriately manage discussions or comments which express resistance or backlash. They might need training on how to have these conversations and discussions.

**Communications**

Staff who have responsibility for communications and media are well placed to promote gender equality. As noted above, it is useful to have prepared statements that express the organisation’s commitment to equality and respect, and to communicate what respectful behaviour in the workplace looks like.
Communications staff can also assist by providing information to key staff on how to respond to backlash and resistance on social media or in emails. They could draft sample responses to backlash when it arises in conversations between staff, in meetings with external stakeholders’ customers, clients and members, and in public forums or presentations.

See *Practice guidance: Communications* for more information.

Getting broader community or industry support for gender equality and the prevention of violence against women can also help promote change. Speaking publicly about violence against women may be part of the organisation’s response to backlash from key external stakeholders or the general public. This requires a high level of skill and knowledge and it may be useful for organisations to work with a violence prevention specialist to do this.

Women’s Health West has prepared information on speaking publicly about prevention of violence against women. It is designed for anyone looking to start conversations about violence against women who is unsure of how to answer commonly asked questions. See *Speaking publicly about preventing men’s violence against women: Curly questions and language considerations* for more information.

**Dealing with backlash on social media**

One of the most common ways to experience backlash is on social media. For example, you may post something on Facebook regarding the prevention of violence against women and find that someone responds in a hostile way asking about violence against men. Being prepared for backlash and resistance is an important part of a communications plan for implementing prevention work. It’s important to develop your own messaging to address backlash as part of your communications plan.
Preparing for this potential criticism could involve a number of different elements including:

- producing a social media response register with draft messages that can be used when you start posting content
- producing more detailed explanation for more difficult topics; for example, producing a detailed explanation of the differences between men’s and women’s experiences of violence.

All staff involved in communications need to be aware of any changes to social media or communications messaging that might result in backlash.
Factsheet 1 | Managing difficult questions

Whenever you’re responding to backlash it’s a good rule of thumb to try to avoid adding heat to difficult conversations. Following are some suggestions to help you manage difficult questions and communicate the key messages of preventing violence against women in a range of settings and roles.

1. **Understand that backlash is an inevitable part of the process.**
   Acknowledge that change takes time and some people take longer to be part of the change process than others. Allow time for individual conversations and relationships to develop.

2. **Be present in the conversation.** Acknowledge that you have heard the other person’s question or concern. Remember that it is easy to misunderstand the concern being expressed. Use active listening to focus on what the person is saying and what is happening during the conversation. For example, “Listening to what you have said ....”

3. **Be open.** Always being right or having the final say in a conversation does not allow people to have an open and safe discussion with you. Look for common ground and values that you both agree with. For example, if someone asks about men as victims, you might begin the discussion by acknowledging that you both have a concern for victims of violence.

4. **Be prepared.** Do your homework on who you will be talking to and what their concerns might be. Make sure you have the right information and evidence about gender equality and violence against women at hand. Plan your conversations and be prepared for the types of questions that might be asked.

5. **Practice talking about violence against women and gender equality.**
   Talking about these issues is not generally something we do every day. Practice responding in short, clear statements and use evidence and true examples.
6. **Make time for self-reflection.** Reflect on how your discussions went and the assumptions and values you bring to your work.

7. **Respect the other person.** Respect that people come from different starting points, and acknowledge that engaging with these issues can mean changing identity, behaviour and privilege.⁶

---


Factsheet 2 | Suggested responses to common questions about violence against women

Some common questions are provided here, with some suggested evidence-based responses. You don’t need to respond word for word but it is good to understand the evidence and prepare yourself to respond by knowing the facts and understanding why your workplace is working to prevent violence against women.

Why is this prevention work being done in workplaces?

Workplaces have a vital role to play in creating an Australia free of violence against women; an Australia where women are not only safe but respected, valued and treated as equals in private and public life. The latest evidence tells us that violence against women can be reduced in Australia by increasing gender equality in all elements of everyday life. Workplaces have a significant influence over people’s professional and personal lives, and society more broadly. Every policy, practice, action and attitude in the workplace has the potential to reinforce or challenge existing gender inequalities. One workplace alone can’t prevent violence against women but all workplaces can contribute significantly to changing the structures, attitudes and norms that perpetuate gender inequality and allow violence against women to occur.

Why do the Workplace Equality and Respect Standards talk about ‘violence against women’ and not ‘family violence’?

The Workplace Equality and Respect Standards⁷ use the term ‘violence against women’ rather than ‘family violence’. The two categories of violence contain significant overlap (as can be seen in Figure 1) and are often used interchangeably within the community. However, they are not quite the same thing.

There is a strong rationale for focusing violence prevention efforts specifically on violence against women, particularly when working in workplace settings.

---

⁷ As part of the Workplace Equality and Respect project a set of Standards has been developed which set out what needs to done to truly embed equality and respect in any workplace. The Workplace Equality and Respect Standards are accompanied by a suite of freely available tools and resources.
Violence against women includes many acts of ‘family violence’, including intimate partner violence, but also comprises a wider range of experiences, including non-partner (or stranger) sexual assault and sexual harassment in both the workplace and on the street, which are some of the most common forms of violence against women in Australia. Violence against women is therefore not limited to violence in the family or domestic sphere, and to focus only on ‘family violence’ would mean ignoring many of the forms of violence against women experienced in the workplace itself.

There are clear gendered dynamics to violence in Australia. The latest international and Australian research demonstrates that, while both men and women can experience violence, the vast majority of victims of violence, whether men or women, reported that the perpetrator was male.\(^8\) Further, as Change the story shows, violence against women is generally very different from the violence men experience, in terms of the form it takes, its severity, and its impacts. In particular, women are more likely than men to experience non-partner sexual violence and to be sexually harassed in the street or at work.\(^9\)

---


Family violence is a broader term. As shown in Figure 1, it does primarily comprise intimate partner violence, which is most commonly experienced by women. However, it also includes violence against children, elder abuse, adolescent violence, and family violence against LGBTQI people. These forms of violence include both female and male victims.

Whilst the Workplace Equality and Respect Standards\textsuperscript{10} include a number of activities to respond to employees and stakeholders experiencing any kind of family violence, the Standards focus on violence against women in recognition both of the strongly gendered dynamics of family violence, and of the other forms of violence women are likely to experience.

A further reason for this focus is that while there is a sound evidence base for the prevention of violence against women,\textsuperscript{11} less is known about what drives other forms of family violence, such as elder abuse, adolescent violence and family or relationship violence against or between LGBTQI people. There is therefore less evidence about what strategies will be effective in preventing these forms of violence.

\textsuperscript{10} Refer to footnote 7

What causes violence against women?

There is no single cause of violence against women. But current international evidence tells us it is more likely to occur where gender inequality is ingrained in social, cultural and organisational structures and practices. The expressions of gender inequality most consistently associated with higher levels of violence against women in the international evidence are:

- social norms (attitudes and beliefs) and institutional practices that excuse, justify or tolerate violence against women
- men’s control of decision making in relationships and public life, and limits to women’s economic and social independence
- rigid and stereotypical gender roles and identities
- male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women.

While gender inequality is always influential as a driver of violence against women, it cannot be considered in isolation, nor is it experienced in the same way by every woman. Other forms of systemic social, political and economic discrimination and disadvantage affect how gender inequality is expressed. There are also a range of factors that reinforce gender inequality which may, in some cases, increase the severity or frequency of violence. But none of these factors predict or drive violence against women on their own.

What is the international evidence to prove that gender inequality causes violence against women?

There is a strong and consistent association in the international evidence between gender inequality and levels of violence against women. Most recently, a 2015 study in medical journal *The Lancet* found factors relating to gender inequality predict the prevalence of intimate partner violence across 44 countries, and a United Nations

---

review found significantly and consistently higher rates of violence against women in countries where women’s economic, social and political rights are poorly protected, and where power and resources are unequally distributed between men and women.¹³

This is true on the broad social scale, but also within intimate relationships, where male dominance and control of wealth is a significant predictor of higher levels of violence against women.¹⁴

Gender inequality isn’t only expressed through imbalances in economic or political power and rights – it’s also found in individual and community beliefs, or social norms, about what men and women are like, and how they are ‘supposed’ to behave. World Health Organisation research has found that individuals (both men and women) who do not believe men and women are equal, and/or see them as having specific roles or characteristics, were also more likely to condone, tolerate or excuse violence against women. Australian research has confirmed that, at the individual level, the most consistent predictor for support of violence against women by men is their agreement with sexist, patriarchal and/or sexually hostile attitudes.¹⁵

Isn’t violence against women and their children an inevitable or intractable social problem?

Violence against women and their children is the product of complex yet modifiable social and environmental factors and is completely preventable.

‘Factors that increase the likelihood of violence against women’ in this Section, and Framework Foundations 2 for further detail.


Haven’t we already achieved gender equality in Australia?

Unfortunately, we are still progressing towards true gender equality in Australia. We have a gender pay gap, which means that the average Australian woman will have to work an extra 64 days to earn what the average man earns and she will retire with an average of 36% or $87,532 less superannuation than men.

Women still undertake the vast majority of the unpaid caring work in Australia, experience higher rates of sexual harassment, gender discrimination and discrimination in the workplace related to family responsibilities, and we are yet to see a representative number of women reach the highest echelons of business and politics in Australia.

Is gender equality and changing roles for women in our society leading to violence?

On the contrary – increasing gender equality is the only way we will sustainably reduce violence. It means creating more positive relationships between men and women, equalising decision making, and promoting independent personal identities and lives that are not constrained by stereotypical ideas of what it means to be a man or a woman.

Change is always challenging, and change to deeply held beliefs doubly so. Research has shown a ‘backlash effect’ where men who adhere strongly to stereotypical notions of dominant masculinity can react with hostility, aggression and even violence when these are challenged.

However, the existence of this ‘backlash effect’ should not be seen as a deterrent from pursuing a more gender equal society. Ultimately, international evidence shows that challenging harmful gender stereotypes and promoting greater respect and equality between women and men will lead to a reduction in violence against women and their children.

What role does alcohol/socio-economic status/mental health/drugs play in violence against women?
There are a number of reinforcing factors that interact with gender inequality to increase the frequency or severity of that violence. These factors do not predict or drive violence on their own. However, they may increase the likelihood of violence against women because they alter the ways in which people might normally act to uphold gender equality and non-violence.

Harmful use of alcohol is an example of a reinforcing factor. Alcohol does not itself drive violence against women; not all people who drink are violent, and many people who do not drink are violent. However, the contribution of alcohol to the increased occurrence or severity of violence is significant in the context of drinking cultures that emphasise harmful gender stereotypes, such as male conquest and aggression.

Research is limited on the impact of other drugs on violence against women; however, similarities to the effects of alcohol might be expected where a drug has a similar effect to alcohol and is used in a way that reinforces gender inequalities.

Socio-economic factors can be useful in predicting the probability of violence against women where they reinforce or worsen existing inequalities between women and men. For example, women who have particularly limited access to wealth and resources may find themselves financially dependent on their partner and therefore restricted when making choices about if/when to leave an abusive partner. However, again, socio-economic factors in and of themselves do not drive violence against women.

Are you saying sexist jokes lead to violence against women?

The most consistent predictor for support of violence by men is their agreement with sexist attitudes.16 Sexist jokes reflect and reinforce sexist attitudes. They excuse and perpetuate the gender stereotyping and discrimination against women that underpins violence. Sexist jokes may seem ‘harmless’ or ‘just a bit of fun’; however, they are

---

based in disrespect for women and are ultimately a way of expressing a belief that women are not equal to men.

While speaking out if someone makes a sexist joke or catcalls a woman on the street may seem unimportant, it is actually key to putting an end to violence against women. Our everyday words and actions matter – they are what help to build a society where women are respected as equals and violence against women is not tolerated.

**Is violence against women really preventable?**

Yes, violence against women is preventable. Violence against women and their children is not inevitable. We now know what drives violence against women and what is required to create a future where it no longer occurs.

The research shows that we must work to shift the particular gender inequalities known to drive violence against women and address the role that the reinforcing factors play in exacerbating these inequalities.

It demonstrates that we must do this work together – across government, business, organisations, schools, sports clubs, the media and through looking at our own relationships, beliefs and attitudes.

We have seen reductions in harmful behaviours in other areas, such as dangerous driving and smoking, by applying these methods – we can do the same for violence against women. So, by drawing on *Change the story* as our roadmap, it is possible to create a future without violence against women and their children.

**What works to prevent violence against women?**

There are many examples of prevention projects that have worked to reduce future violence. For example, four years after implementation of a schools program in the US called Safe Dates, those who participated reported 56% to 92% less physical, serious physical, and sexual dating violence victimisation and perpetration than students who did not.\(^{17}\) In Australia, positive changes in attitudes, practices and

---

behaviours have been demonstrated by prevention projects in schools, workplaces, sporting clubs and other settings.

But we know that we can’t end violence ‘project by project’. The evidence shows that we need to reach everyone, everywhere, with activities that reinforce each other – otherwise the reach of prevention is too limited to achieve social change, and the impact on participant’s risks being ‘dampened’ over time.

For example, whole-of-school Respectful Relationships Education should be reinforced by programs for young people in sporting clubs and through social media. Adults should also be engaged in multiple ways – in workplaces, communities and social spaces. And our media and popular culture, our policy and legislation should all be based on gender equality and respect. This kind of comprehensive approach would mean every place we live, learn, work and play reinforces consistent messaging and is inclusive, equitable and safe for all.

Why not men?

Regardless of gender, violence against anyone is unacceptable and is devastating for all who are subjected to it. Both men and women can experience violence, yet data shows that violence against women is likely to be different in terms of the form the violence takes, its severity and impacts.

The vast majority of violent acts – whether against men or women – are perpetrated by men.  

Action that promotes respectful and non-violent relationships benefits the whole community, including men.

---

Is backlash, from men’s rights groups and others, inevitable as part of this change?

There will be groups and individuals who resist supporting the changes required to see an end to violence against women and their children. This is to be expected, particularly given that creating an Australia where women and children live free from violence means challenging deeply held beliefs and attitudes about the roles and contributions of women and men – topics which can trigger strong reactions.

Knowing that there will be some who strongly disagree with the content and approach of *Change the story* need not be a deterrent. Being aware of this means that we can work together to respond to and manage the potential ‘backlash’. For example, we can draw on the strong evidence base in *Change the story* to contribute to and encourage informed public discussion.

Non-violent men can help by supporting those working to end violence against women, speaking out against attempts to undermine this effort, challenging backlash and talking about the issue with friends, peers and colleagues.

**Further reading**

If you want more guidance on managing resistance and backlash to gender equality initiatives you can download VicHealth’s paper: *(En*)countering resistance Strategies to respond to resistance to gender equality initiatives (2018)