House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs

Via email : family.violence.reps@aph.gov.au

24 July 2020

Dear Committee

Submission to the Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence. We are a social change organisation. We work with the most disadvantaged members of the community, providing services and advocacy in the areas of justice and crime prevention; mental health and well-being; settlement and community building; education, training and employment; and gender and ecological justice.

Advocacy underpins all that we do.

Our history working with men and boys

Jesuit Social Services has been working with boys and men for over 40 years. This work has included engaging with boys and men involved in the criminal justice system, including those leaving prison; establishing Victoria's first dedicated counselling service working with young people struggling with concurrent mental health and substance abuse problems; and the Support After Suicide program which provides free individual and family counselling to people bereaved by suicide and runs a specialist men's group.

Many of the boys and men we work with use violence, and we see many of them hold harmful attitudes towards girls and women. Our work with men who have committed serious violent and sex offences seeks, upon release from prison, a successful transition back into the community to lower the risk of recidivism and improve community safety.

But there is a need to do much more. The focus has been, as it should be, on supporting the victims of this violence. But we must also address the root causes.

Boys and men are over-represented in key indicators of harmful social behaviours and negative social outcomes such as the perpetration of violence and other crimes. Around 95 per cent of victims of violence experience violence from a male perpetrator[i]; 93 per cent of all prisoners in Victoria are male[ii]; and, on average, 6 men suicide each day[iii]. In Victorian schools, almost 80 per cent of expulsions are boys).[iv] There is a compelling need to address the root causes of violence.

Drawing from our experience, The Men's Project has been established to provide leadership and to develop new approaches to reduce violence and other harmful behaviours prevalent among boys and men, to build new approaches to improve their wellbeing, and to keep families and communities safe. The Men's Project incorporates a range of initiatives across three areas of work, namely to:

1) Promote cultural and attitudinal change around issues of masculinity and gender to support primary prevention of violence efforts including building workforce capacity.

2) Develop, deliver and evaluate interventions that intervene earlier to address violence and other harmful behaviour.

3) Produce and share knowledge about the attitudes of men and boys including how these attitudes impact behaviours.

Jesuit Social Services' understanding of gender inequality and the use of violence

Gender inequality refers to the way in which narrow, rigid gender norms and stereotypes limit individuals and groups of both men and women, thereby preventing them from living fulfilling and productive lives where they can flourish and reach their full potential.

Gender inequality is problematic for both women and men. Gender norms and expectations that have historically limited women's participation in public life and the workforce, and today see high rates of violence against women perpetrated by men, are also having a detrimental impact on men and boys.

Research, including our Man Box reports outlined below, has shown that men who conform to dominant masculine norms (that men should be tough, stoic, dominant, daring, and in control) are more likely to engage in risky behaviours and less likely to engage in health promotion behaviours. They are also more likely to use physical violence and sexually harass women.

The reasons for these manifestations of systemic dysfunction are complex and multi-faceted but have much to do with the way in which boys and men are acculturated into dominant masculine gender norms. These norms derive from deeply embedded gendered beliefs and structures that have evolved over generations in a myriad of cultural contexts, and across major shifts in social, environmental and economic conditions throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

They are also the product of our collective failure to call out this inequality and put in place the processes and settings that foster behaviour change, stem poor trajectories or break cycles of inequality, exclusion and violence.

The Man Box

In 2018, The Men's Project at Jesuit Social Services worked with global leaders in gender norms research, Promundo, to undertake a survey of 1,000 young Australian men. The focus of the survey was on men's attitudes and behaviours in relation to a set of questions about gender.

To do this work we used an analytical tool, the Man Box, to understand the impact of strongly adhering to stereotypical ideas about what it means to be a man.

Our findings are clear – the Man Box is alive and well in Australia today with the majority of young men agreeing there are social pressures around being a 'real man'.

A significant minority of young men personally endorse many of these rules, particularly around acting tough, being the primary income earner and being in control. In general, young men hold more progressive views on what it is to be a 'real man' than what they believe society is telling them. These findings show that many young men feel pressure to behave in ways that align with the Man Box rules in order to be seen as a 'real man', despite not personally endorsing these beliefs, and despite these behaviours being harmful to both them and others.

The research shows that men who endorse the rules of the Man Box are more likely than other men to experience poor life outcomes. Specifically, men in the Man Box are 20 times more likely to self-report sexually harassing a woman, 14 times more likely to self-report the use of physical violence and over twice as likely to experience suicidal thoughts.

We have recently released a follow-up to our initial report, Unpacking the Man Box, which finds that rigid masculine stereotypes have a stronger impact on these life outcomes than other factors including men's education levels, where they live or their cultural heritage. Specifically, the report found that outdated attitudes related to gender is over:

- 25 times more accurate than a range of demographic variables in predicting *the use* of physical violence, sexual harassment, verbal bullying and cyber bullying

- 22 times more accurate in predicting *the experience of* physical violence, verbal bullying and cyber bullying

- 11 times more accurate than demographics at predicting very risky drinking; and

- 10 times more accurate than demographics at predicting negative feelings and emotions.

The links between crises and conforming to stereotypical gender norms

International and Australian evidence tells us that when disasters occur, we see people revert to conservative gender stereotypes. Men feel the expectation to be decisive and strong, and capable of the heroic protection of life and property. These attitudes and behaviours are compounded by feelings of a loss of control over men's lives. This lack of control can lead to an attempt to increase power in other aspects of one's life. Women are expected to be nurturing, supportive, care for the children and passively withdraw from the frontline of the crisis.

Gender stereotypes are already known to have harmful impacts on both men and women. During a disaster these impacts are compounded as men attempt to live up to the expectations of the heroic, in control male. Gender roles are more strongly adhered to during a crisis, with catastrophic consequences for the level of domestic violence.

As men revert to, or have their male stereotype reinforced, there typically follows an escalation in gender inequity, disrespect and abuse of women. Not only does abuse and violence increase in frequency, but also in severity. And where there may not have been violence previously, the precursors to abuse and family violence can begin to emerge.

Family violence is one of the most harmful outcomes of disasters. If domestic violence is already occurring in the household, the situation caused by the pandemic is particularly dangerous. A partner may escalate their attempts to dominate and establish psychological, emotional, physical, financial and sexual control over the other partner[v].Both gender-based violence as well as child abuse and neglect are likely to increase in situations where there are movement restrictions, loss of income, isolation, overcrowding, stress and anxiety. The lack of social contact can lead abusers to escalate their controlling activities due to their lack of emotional resources and coping skills to handle the pressure[vi].

There has been evidence from previous disasters that domestic violence increases after catastrophic events. For example, domestic violence increased by 46% in Othello, Washington after the eruption of Mount St Helens[vii]; there was a doubling of partner physical abuse and an increase of 35% of psychological

abuse in the southern Mississippi counties after Hurricane Katrina in 2005[viii] and interviews confirmed an increase in domestic violence after the "Black Saturday" bushfires in Victoria in 2009[ix].

Although they have not as yet been published studies that have tracked the trends in gender-based violence due to the coronavirus pandemic, initial reports from a range of different countries suggest that there has been an increase[x].

In Australia, early findings of a study that surveyed 166 family violence support practitioners in Victoria from the end of April until the end of May 2020 were reported in the Age[xi] newspaper. The results of the study indicated that almost 60% of the practitioners reported an increase in the frequency of violence against women, half reported that the level of violence had increased and, of most concern, over 40% reported an increase in the number of first-time family violence offenders. Perpetrators were reported to be preventing women from leaving the home and demanding that women wash their bodies and hands to the point that they bled[xii].

Recommendations related to the prevention of violence against women and their children

We have outlined seven recommendations for the Committee's consideration.

1. Build workforce capacity to engage on issues related to the Man Box with a focus on influencers working with men and boys in sectors related to violence and sexual harassment prevention

Research and practice expertise suggests that role models – both male and female – in the places where boys and men live, work, and meet are crucial. We want to support role models who interact with boys and men on a regular basis so they can challenge limiting and harmful stereotypes and promote respect and equality towards women.

This is why we have developed the Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) program, to support participants to develop greater self-awareness, build a deeper understanding of key issues, learn how to model and promote positive change, and recognise and challenge problematic attitudes and behaviours. Ongoing support is offered for participants to identify and action opportunities and activities in their own communities. We commend the Federal Government for committing to funding, across the 2019-20 to 2021-22 financial years, primary prevention activities that encourage men to be positive role models.

We recommend that this funding is expanded and also includes female role models. Potential settings for this expansion could include working with mental health professionals, teachers, university educators and maternal and child health professionals. Noting some of these areas are under the jurisdiction of state governments, the Federal Government could provide funding to support this work.

2. Invest in research to better understand the behaviours and attitudes of men and boys in relation to The Man Box norms.

Further detailed research should also be undertaken to better understand the behaviours and attitudes of men and boys in relation to The Man Box norms as well as the associated links to the use of violence. While there is increasing attention on preventing violence by engaging with men and boys, there is limited data on their attitudes and how these attitudes impact behaviour. This is in

keeping with the Department of Health's National Men's Health Strategy 2020–2030 – specifically, objective 3, which identifies a need to build the evidence base for improving the health and wellbeing of men and boys through investment in research.

We would welcome the opportunity to be part of a longitudinal approach to Man Box data collection to track progress over time. Other areas of future research include understanding:

- *the most effective ways to positively influence adherence to masculine norms so that boys and men are free to choose who they want to be:* There are gaps in our understanding and the associated research evidence about the interventions that are most effective to decrease adherence to stereotypical masculine norms. There may be merit in focussing on the individual pillars of masculinity that appear to be particularly damaging such as hypersexuality and the combination of rigid gender roles and aggression/control. This work should also examine the extent to which shifting adherence to masculine norms results in a subsequent shift in life outcomes such as use of violence and mental health. To facilitate improved understanding, pilot programs focussing on decreasing adherence to masculine norms should be subject to evaluation, ideally working with university partners with expertise in masculinities research, with lessons from these evaluations shared widely.

- *the impact of adhering to masculine norms across different situational contexts, including the potential for positive impacts and the influence on men's relationships with others in their lives:* In specific contexts, some stereotypical masculine norms may play a protective role or have a positive impact. As part of research to better understand the moderating role of specific contexts, there could be a focus on the protective, positive and healthy aspects of masculinities. There are also specific contexts that warrant further exploration given there are periods where the risk of violence is higher, such as post breakdown of an intimate relationship, and post pregnancy and the birth of a child. Context specific work to understand the influence of masculine norms will allow men to positively influence key people in their lives including partners, children, peers, and workmates.

The Men's Project is also in the early stages of completing work to understand the attitudes and behaviours of adolescent boys. We have adapted our original study with adult men and created the Adolescent Man Box survey – the first study of its kind in the world. It focuses on the attitudes to manhood of adolescent boys aged 11 to 18, and the association between these attitudes and their mental health, well-being, risk taking, sexist attitudes and behaviours. Scaling up this survey has the potential to inform curriculum and also serve as an important evaluation tool. Ultimately, this is about intervening early to prevent the development of harmful attitudes and behaviours.

3. **Commit to funding Starting Over on a long term basis to provide restorative responses to adolescents showing violent behaviour in the home, often towards their mothers, and lower the age of eligibility for the program.**

Jesuit Social Services is developing and trialling new ways of working with adolescents who commit family violence, including through Starting Over, an adolescent family violence pilot program working with adolescents and their families in Western Sydney. This work draws on our experience using restorative justice in responding to youth offending, and offers a Family Group Conference process

for young people who have committed family violence. Importantly, the process of preparing for a Conference seeks to build trust and empathy and identify supports that the family may benefit from.

Funding for Starting Over from the Department of Social Services lapsed in December 2019, which means we have had to end this program leaving adolescents, their families and our partners – schools and local community organisations – without a service to meet significant need. One of the recommendations from the evaluation, conducted by the University of Melbourne, was:

> "*Given the positive outcomes documented, there is sufficient promise in applying a restorative family group conferencing model to address AFV to warrant ongoing government investment in additional pilot programs*"

Jesuit Social Services calls for a commitment to ongoing and longer term funding for this important program. In addition, the current age of eligibility is 10 to 16 years old. Intervention is needed even earlier, to work with children at the first signs of vulnerability to violence.

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4. Invest in national early intervention programs in Australia for adults, children and young people who are worried about their sexual thoughts or behaviours in relation to children, including funding Stop it Now! We estimate that a national Stop it Now! pilot over four years to prevent child sexual abuse could be delivered at a cost of approximately $2 million per year.

There are currently no national early interventions in Australia for adults, children and young people who are worried about their sexual thoughts or behaviours in relation to children. The gap in preventative interventions for potential perpetrators was identified by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Through the Men's Project, Jesuit Social Services is working to address this gap. One initiative we are recommending for application in Australia is Stop It Now!, a secondary prevention program that operates successfully in North America, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and the Netherlands, and has also previously operated on a small scale in Queensland. This program was highlighted as a potential model to adopt in the National Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Strategy recommended by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

A key feature of Stop It Now! is a national confidential and anonymous phone helpline that provides information and support for people who are worried about their own sexual thoughts and behaviours, as well as parents, family-members, and professionals who are concerned about actual or potential child sexual abuse. The phone helpline and text contact facility would balance engagement with accountability, provide information, complete safety planning based on a comprehensive risk assessment, and facilitate referrals for additional assistance (in compliance with legal and mandatory reporting obligations). The program would also include a website with advice, self-help materials and guidance to raise awareness around child abuse, as well as links to a network of partner agencies who would refer to and receive referrals from Stop It Now! Australia.

As part of The Men's Project, Jesuit Social Services, in collaboration with the University of Melbourne, has assessed the feasibility of a Stop It Now! phone helpline. Discussions with a wide range of stakeholders revealed strong support for a Stop It Now! program in Australia. A copy of the full scoping study including the proposed preliminary models and recommendations for its operation in Australia is available here.

We estimate that a national pilot over four years could be delivered at a cost of approximately $2 million per year. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse noted that telephone and online interventions can be as effective as face-to-face services, are cost-effective, and can be accessed from regional and remote areas. These are especially valuable features, given the current difficulties faced by many services in the context of restrictions associated with government measures dealing with the current COVID-19 pandemic. The economic evaluation in the UK found estimated benefits of up to £6.15m per annum – over 15 times larger than annual costs.

5. Expand Rights Resilience and Respectful Relationships (RRRR) Curriculum to other states (beyond Victoria) emphasising healthier masculinities and, more broadly, share lessons from Victoria's implementation of RRRR.

In response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence, the Victorian Government has committed to implementing the Rights Resilience and Respectful Relationships curriculum. As a result, a generation of young people are being supported to development social, emotional and positive relationship skills.

Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins' recent report – Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces – recommended that primary prevention activities be, among other things, focussed on:

"respectful relationships education in schools that includes content on sexual harassment as a form of gender-based violence and recognises that sexual harassment is driven by gender inequality"

We strongly support these recommendations and, through the national curriculum and teacher training at universities, recommend the federal government take a leadership role in this regard.

6. Governments and other funders should adequately fund co-design and partnerships between organisations that provide service delivery that prevents aggression among men as well as violence towards women and families.

It is important that governments continue to fund partnership work between organisations to implement programs that prevent aggression among men and violence towards women and families. This work should particularly seek involvement from the Women's Health sector. Programs need be to co-designed and co-delivered across organisations with expertise in the use of violence to ensure they address the specific needs of the men in each program. Funding of programs should be mindful of the time required to complete genuine co-design when programs are seeking to address complex behavioural and attitudinal challenges.

7. Fund The Men's Project to conduct research on how best to prevent the use of violence including better understanding the link between attitudes and behaviours as well as evaluating the effectiveness of interventions that seek to engage with men and boys before the point of crisis
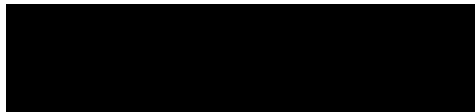
As acknowledged in the Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022, the evidence of what works to reduce violence and inform responses is "far from complete." One of the Fourth Action Plan's priority areas is to build this evidence base

through dedicated research and data projects, in addition to the important research led by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety.

Building on the Fourth action plan, Jesuit Social Services proposes that The Men's Project could play a central role improving the creation, sharing and use of high-quality evidence on the prevention of violence, and help drive more effective evidence-informed policy and decision-making. While there is increased program activity focused on preventing violence, there are major gaps in the evidence base including longitudinal data on the links between attitudes and behaviours as well as the efficacy of approaches used to prevent violence. Given Jesuit Social Services practice experience, we are uniquely positioned to fill these evidence gaps and translate the implications into practice.

We appreciate the Committee taking these matters into consideration, and would appreciate the opportunity to present at a public hearing, pending scheduling.

Yours sincerely

Julie Edwards – CEO, Jesuit Social Services

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