

Campaign hit by false stats

BRAD CROUCH

A DOMESTIC violence campaign has been tarnished with twisted crime statistics and a critical Ombudsman's report, amid claims State Minister Gail Gago's Office for Women has been hijacked by "feminists pushing a political agenda".

Premier Mike Rann has been asked to shift the Don't Cross the Line domestic violence campaign from Ms Gago's portfolio to the Attorney General's Department, so the campaign takes into account violence in the home against men and children as well as women.

Ms Gago has confirmed there were "transcribing errors" in the Don't Cross the Line campaign, and the data was not handled with due diligence. Nor was the false information corrected after it was challenged.

Ms Gago declined to say if anyone in her office had been disciplined.

The statistics inflated instances of domestic violence against women, wrongly saying, for example, that 95 per cent of domestic violence involved a male perpetrator and a female victim. All violence against women was also referred to as domestic violence.

There were seven more incorrect facts, according to the Australian



Misleading: A campaign poster

Institute of Criminology (AIC). The organisation Men's Health Australia complained to SA Ombudsman Richard Bingham after the Office For Women (OFW) refused to correct the statistics when contacted almost a year ago. The Ombudsman upheld the complaint.

Mr Bingham concluded the OFW "originally published some false and/or misleading information on the Don't Cross the Line website".

"My opinion is that this was unreasonable and wrong administrative action," he found.

"My view is that OFW failed to correct information on the website once the possible errors were brought to its attention (and) failed to act with reasonable diligence and speed once

possible errors were brought to its attention."

Greg Andresen, of Men's Health Australia, wrote to Mr Rann this month requesting the campaign be moved to the Attorney-General's Department but said he was yet to receive a reply.

"They replaced the original misleading statistics with a page that only talks about violence against women by men – they are still portraying relationship violence as something that men do to women alone," Mr Andresen said.

"We are fully supportive of all attempts to reduce violence against women but this campaign infers that only women are victims.

"We feel they are feminists pushing a political agenda."

Ms Gago said "domestic violence campaign is not a competition between men and women".

"It should be noted that SA recently passed new domestic abuse legislation which is gender-neutral," she said. A research study released this year by Perth's Edith Cowan University found male victims of partner abuse were reluctant to seek help because of fears they would not be believed or instead blamed.

» For help with domestic violence issues, ring Domestic Violence Helpline, ph 1800 800 098.