

**A response by the One in Three Campaign to media commentary by
domestic violence organisations for ABC TV Media Watch**



A recent [episode](#) of ABC TV's Media Watch on 2nd March 2020 covered the story of media commentator Bettina Arndt's controversial comments about the tragic murder of Hannah Clarke and her children, and their resulting condemnation by media and government alike.

As part of the ABC's investigation, comment was requested from three of the top government-funded domestic violence organisations in Australia – ANROWS, *Our Watch*, and *Domestic Violence NSW*. These three agencies all operate from a feminist framework dealing exclusively with female victims and their research is tailored to that end. The ABC neglected to contact the One in Three Campaign – an unfunded volunteer organisation, but the only agency in Australia established to support male victims of family violence.

The ABC put the following question to each organisation:

Is Bettina Arndt correct in saying “our official statistics show at least a third of victims of domestic violence are male”? Does this statistic reflect the reality of the problem of domestic violence in Australia?

The responses contained errors, omitted relevant data, were frequently unreferenced, and appeared to be written in order to downplay and minimise the experience of male victims of family and domestic violence in Australia.

ANROWS

ANROWS' [response](#) to the ABC was as follows:

It is not accurate to say “at least a third of victims of domestic violence are male”; it is accurate to say “one in three people who reported experiencing an act of violence by a partner in the 12 months prior to the 2016 PSS were male”. That’s all she can say about the victimisation of men: it’s a limited statement, and it’s viewed in isolation from all the other evidence we have.

We know from the ABS 2016 Personal Safety Survey that for all the people who reported they had experienced an act of physical or sexual violence by a partner in the previous 12 months, one third was male, and two thirds were female. Note, a partner relationships refers to a couple who are or have lived together in a marriage or de factor relationship.

This figure represents a limited picture of the experience of partner violence in Australia. The purpose of collecting data for the previous 12 months is to measure change over time. A more complete picture is available in the PSS from the lifetime experience of violence. Here we see a much greater difference between the experiences of men and women in terms of reported experiences of violence: one in six women, and one in 16 men have experienced partner violence since the age of 15.

ANROWS is correct that one in three people who reported experiencing an act of violence by a partner in the 12 months prior to the 2016 PSS were male, and that one in six women, and one in 16 men have experienced partner violence since the age of 15.

However, lifetime measurements of domestic violence don't capture current rates of violence, as a person who experienced violence in the 1960s, when domestic violence was still seen as a 'personal matter' and there was little social awareness or support, is tallied alongside a person who experienced domestic violence a month ago. This is why the 'last 12 months' data must always be used in order to capture current prevalence rates.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the 2016 PSS [found](#) that 35 per cent (more than a third) of persons who experienced violence from a current partner since the age of 15 were male.

ANROWS has also omitted important data from the 2016 PSS that doesn't fit their narrative. The 2016 PSS [found](#) that not only a third of persons who experienced partner violence in the last 12 months were male, but a third of persons who experienced violence by a boyfriend/girlfriend or date (and the sum of these: persons who experienced violence by an intimate partner) in the last 12 months were also male.

The contemporary definition of domestic violence used across the board in academia, government, the media and among service providers, considers emotional abuse to be a form of domestic violence (along with sexual, psychological, verbal and financial abuse, property damage and social isolation). The 2016 PSS also [found](#) that, of persons who experienced emotional abuse by a partner in the last 12 months, 46 per cent were male and 54 per cent were female.

ANROWS is also wrong to claim that the 2016 PSS data is the only data point showing that one third of victims are male. They ignore the wealth of publicly available Australian data from multiple sources published on our [website](#) showing that one third of victims – and often more – are male.

In just one example, the Australian Institute of Family Studies found in their [Experiences of Separated Parents Study](#) (2015) that males (fathers) made up 41.3 per cent of parents who reported experiencing physical hurt (with or without emotional abuse) before/during separation.

ANROWS went on to say:

The context of the violence, whether experienced by men or women, is not known from the Personal Safety Survey. That is, we don't know whether an act of physical violence by a partner was self-defence or retaliation, or whether it was used as a tactic of coercive control—a form of domestic violence aimed at dominating and controlling the life of a partner. Coercive control is defined by international expert Evan Stark as “an attack on autonomy, liberty, and equality” and experts on typologies of violence agree that coercive controlling abuse is perpetrated almost exclusively by men against women.

ANROWS is quite correct that the context of the violence is not known from the PSS. It would be a simple matter for the PSS to capture the context of the violence with a few simple questions about self-defence and/or retaliation, but despite the ABS having

regularly consulted with women's organisations such as ANROWS for decades, such questions have yet to be added to the survey.

It is incorrect for ANROWS to claim (without citations) that experts on typologies of violence agree that coercive controlling abuse is perpetrated almost exclusively by men against women. Some experts certainly argue this is the case, but others disagree. For example, a 2014 [study](#) by Elizabeth Bates from the University of Cumbria, along with Nicola Graham-Kevan and John Archer from the University of Central Lancashire, found that there were no substantial sex differences in controlling behaviour, which significantly predicted physical aggression in both sexes. Using Johnson's (1995) typology, women were more likely than men to be classed as "intimate terrorists", which was counter to earlier findings. Overall, their results did not support the male control theory of intimate partner violence.

It is unclear what point ANROWS is trying to make when they raise the issue of coercive control. Are they arguing that physical violence in the absence of coercive control isn't "real domestic violence"? This would be an alarming claim to make, as coercive control, while certainly the most severe type of domestic violence, is also extremely rare (it is unlikely to be captured at all by large population studies such as the ABS PSS). What implications would this claim have for the vast majority of female victims of domestic violence where coercive control is absent, let alone male victims in this situation?

Feminist scholar Michael Johnson, one of the best known experts on typologies of violence, [acknowledges](#) that:

- "women both initiate violence and participate in mutual violence and that, particularly in teenage and young adult samples, women perpetrate violence against their partners more frequently than do the men"
- "repeat, severe violence against a non-violent intimate is symmetrical by gender"
- "I and others have always noted that situational couple violence
 - (a) is far and away the most common form of intimate partner violence,
 - (b) is perpetrated about equally by men and women, and
 - (c) can be extremely consequential."

ANROWS continue:

This illustrates the need to consider the PSS result referred to by Ms Arndt in light of all the other national and international evidence that consistently shows that women experience domestic violence at much greater rates than do men.

It's a great pity that ANROWS were unable to cite examples of such evidence. The largest meta-analysis of international evidence ever undertaken – the [Partner Abuse State of Knowledge Project](#) – found:

- Overall, 22% of individuals assaulted by a partner at least once in their lifetime (23% for females and 19.3% for males)
- Higher overall rates among dating students
- Higher victimisation for male than female high school students
- Lifetime rates higher among women than men

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- Past year rates somewhat higher among men
- Higher rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) among younger, dating populations
- Among large population samples, 57.9% of IPV reported was bi-directional, 42% unidirectional; 13.8% of the unidirectional violence was male to female (MFPV), 28.3% was female to male (FMPV)
- Among school and college samples, percentage of bidirectional violence was 51.9%; 16.2% was MFPV and 31.9% was FMPV.

ANROWS finished their reply as follows:

Further, gender differences are also highlighted in PSS results showing that women who experienced assault by a male were twice as likely as men to have experienced anxiety or fear for their safety; and women were more than three times as likely as men to have experienced violence perpetrated by a previous partner.

ANROWS is correct that the PSS [results](#) do show gender differences. The correct statistics are as follows:

- 46 per cent of females and 32 per cent* of males who experienced current partner violence, experienced anxiety or fear for their personal safety
- 22 per cent of female and 18 per cent** of males who experienced current partner violence, experienced anxiety or fear for their personal safety in the last 12 months
- 65 per cent of females and 30 per cent of males who experienced previous partner violence, experienced anxiety or fear for their personal safety
- 14 per cent of females and 8 per cent of males who experienced previous partner violence, experienced anxiety or fear for their personal safety in the last 12 months
- 59 per cent of females and 41 per cent of males experienced anxiety or fear due to current partner emotional abuse
- 72 per cent of females and 43 per cent of males experienced anxiety or fear due to previous partner emotional abuse

* Proportion has a margin of error of 13.6 percentage points (due to the proportionally small male sample size in the PSS), which should be considered when using this information.

**Proportion has a margin of error of 13.7 percentage points (due to the proportionally small male sample size in the PSS), which should be considered when using this information.

ANROWS' "twice as likely" claim only holds true for previous partner violence. The gender differences narrow markedly when current partner violence and emotional abuse is analysed, and when data is narrowed down to the last 12 months.

- Females were 3.5 times as likely as males to have experienced violence perpetrated by a previous partner since the age of 15. Still, that is 397,300 Australian males who have experienced previous partner violence – not an insignificant number.

The PSS also found gender differences in reporting and help-seeking. Men who had experienced partner violence were 2 to 3 times more likely than women to have never told anybody about experiencing partner violence and around 50 per cent more likely than women to have never sought advice or support about experiencing partner violence. It is quite possible that this gender difference also played a part in producing lower reporting rates by men when interviewed for the PSS.

As far as anxiety and fear go, the Australian Institute of Family Studies' [Experiences of Separated Parents Study](#) found there was no statistically significant difference between fathers and mothers in the frequency of reporting having often felt fearful after experiencing physical violence or emotional abuse since separation, and fathers were statistically significantly more likely than mothers to report having often felt controlled or coerced after experiencing physical violence or emotional abuse since separation.

It is important to note that we are not arguing gender symmetry in domestic violence (clearly, if one third of victims are male, twice as many are female!). We have consistently argued that, while on average, women are injured more than men, [men are injured too, and often seriously](#). However, the overall physical and psychological effects of intimate partner violence [are similar for men and women](#).

There is one notable area of domestic violence in which there does not appear to be significant gender differences. This is in our most vulnerable population: filicide (murders of children by their parents). The Australian Institute of Criminology in their 2015 report [Domestic/family homicide in Australia](#) found that filicide was the second most common form of domestic homicide after intimate partner homicides. Males were more likely than females to be the victims in filicides (56% cf 44%). Females accounted for over half the offenders in filicides (52%). Regrettably ANROWS, Our Watch and Domestic Violence NSW appear to be silent when it comes to children murdered by their parents.

Our Watch

The [response](#) from Our Watch was as follows:

No, this is not correct. The best official statistics we have – Australian Bureau of Statistics data from the regular Personal Safety Survey – show that women are nearly three times as likely to experience violence from an intimate partner than men.

As argued above, this 'lifetime' data claim, while [accurate](#) (females are 3.1 times as likely to have experienced violence from an intimate partner since the age of 15 compared to males) does not capture current rates of violence. The 'last 12 months' [data](#) shows that 35 per cent of persons who experienced violence from an intimate partner were male.

The claim that a third of victims are male has been repeatedly debunked by experts in this field.

Our Watch is unable to cite examples of this 'debunking' despite it apparently having been done repeatedly. We are unaware of any such examples.

The way we have seen this statistic used is that it is picked from one particular data table among many results in the ABS survey. Therefore, using it on its own to portray a full picture of both physical and non-physical intimate partner violence is not appropriate.

As argued above, this is incorrect.

The ABS itself has a warning that this figure has a high relative standard error, and should be used with caution.

This is a false and misleading claim. There is no high relative standard error requiring the use of caution for the 'last 12 months' [data](#) showing that one third of people who experienced violence from an intimate partner (RSE=16%) or from a cohabiting partner (RSE=18.8%) were male.

The Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee's 2015 [report](#) into domestic violence in Australia recommended that, "further work is required to address domestic and family violence against men and the data on its prevalence, noting that only 22 per cent of the respondents in the Public Safety Survey undertaken by the ABS were male." If the ABS PSS used a larger male sample size as recommended by this report, the RSE would be reduced.

It is misleading to use this figure alone, whilst ignoring all the other figures in the survey that draw the fuller picture, and that make it very clear that intimate partner violence is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women.

As argued above, this is incorrect.

Of course both men and women can experience violence, but ABS data clearly shows violence against women is different in the form it takes as well as its severity and impact.

As argued above, we agree, however this is irrelevant to the question being asked about the proportions of male and female victims in Australia.

Around 95 per cent of all victims of violence in Australia whether men or women experience violence from a male perpetrator.

This is out-of date data and tells only half the story. The older ABS PSS 2012 [found](#) that 95 per cent (n=7,294,100) of persons who experienced violence since the age of 15 had experienced violence by a male perpetrator. It also found that 26 per cent (n=2,009,600) had experienced violence by a female perpetrator.

The up-to-date data from the most recent 2016 ABS PSS [found](#) that 92 per cent (n=6,686,700) of persons who experienced violence since the age of 15 had experienced violence by a male perpetrator. It also found that 27 per cent (n=1,981,700) had experienced violence by a female perpetrator.

Men are more likely to experience a one-off incident of violence in a public place by a stranger, whereas women are more likely to be subject to years of violence, abuse and coercive control at the hands of their current or former partner, often behind closed doors meaning they are also more likely to be living in ongoing fear.

This claim is irrelevant to the question being asked and is so vague and unreferenced that it is impossible to examine for factual accuracy. The first part of the claim – that men are



more likely (presumably, than women) to experience a one-off incident of violence in a public place by a stranger is somewhat able to be tested. The ABS PSS [found](#) that 27 per cent of males and 9 per cent of females had experienced violence from a stranger since the age of 15 (still, that's 880,800 females – not an insignificant number).

The PSS also [found](#) that, in the most recent incident of violence experienced in the last 10 years, 28 per cent of men and 5 per cent of women had experienced physical assault by a male perpetrator at a place of entertainment/recreation, and 9 per cent of men and 16 per cent of women had experienced such by a female perpetrator. When the location was “outside”, 28 per cent of men and 5 per cent of women had experienced physical assault by a male perpetrator, and 5 per cent of men and 17 per cent of women had experienced such by a female perpetrator.

As far as we are aware, the most recent PSS didn't publish data on whether incidents of violence by strangers were experienced as once-offs or more frequently.

The first part of the claim is probably more-or-less accurate, however it is irrelevant to the question asked, and even though men are more affected than women, a significant number of women are also affected.

The second part of the claim – that women are more likely (presumably than men) to be subject to years of violence, abuse and coercive control at the hands of their current or former partner, often behind closed doors meaning they are also more likely to be living in ongoing fear – is so broad that it is unable to be tested.

Nevertheless, from our knowledge of the overall literature on domestic violence, the claim is likely to be more-or-less true. However, it is irrelevant to the question asked, and even though women are more likely to be affected than men, a significant number of men are also affected.

DV NSW

The [response](#) from Domestic Violence NSW was as follows:

Ms Arndt's statement does not reflect the reality of domestic violence in our community.

Statistical information, including that compiled by BOCSAR (using NSW Police data in NSW), the ABS (Personal Safety Survey), the research organisation ANROWS, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, and Our Watch, all point to the fact that the majority of domestic violence offences are against women by men in the context of an intimate relationship or family setting.

This claim is irrelevant to the question asked. The claim could be true even if at least a third of victims of domestic violence are male, as claimed by Ms Arndt.

The crime of domestic violence is inherently gendered. From 2016 research, of the 29,227 recorded incidents of domestic violence assaults between April 2015 and

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March 2016, 69.54% of victims were female and 80.96% of alleged offenders were male.

This claim is vague and has no citation, so it's difficult to verify for accuracy. However, it is likely to be a BOCSAR statistic. The [latest data](#) from BOCSAR (NSW Recorded Crime Statistics April 2019 to March 2020) found that 68 per cent of victims for domestic violence related assault were female and 75 per cent of alleged offenders were male. This fits Ms Arndt's claim that one third of victims are male.

Of course, domestic violence is not 'inherently gendered' when it comes to parents who murder their children, as argued above.

Similarly, 83.09% of victims in the recorded incidents of breaches of ADVOs between April 2015 and March 2016 were female.

The ABS PSS [found](#) that men who have experienced previous partner violence were less than half as likely as women to have had a restraining order issued against the perpetrator. This fact may influence the proportion of recorded incidents of breaches of ADVOs that were male.

One Australian women dies, on average, each week, at the hands of her partner or former partner.

This claim is irrelevant to the question asked.

One in 6 Australian women and 1 in 16 men have been subjected, since the age of 15, to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or previous cohabiting partner (ABS 2017b).

As we have argued above, 'last 12 months' data should be used as this 'lifetime' data doesn't capture current rates of violence.

Family, domestic and sexual violence happens repeatedly more than half (54%) of the women who had experienced current partner violence, experienced more than one violent incident (ABS 2017b).

This claim is irrelevant to the questions asked by the ABC. The same table from the same [survey](#) found that two thirds (65%) of males who had experienced current partner violence since age 15, experienced more than one incident. This demonstrates that male victims of current partner violence are more likely than female victims to experience repeated violence.

In 2016, on average, police recorded 52 sexual assaults each day against women and about 11 against men (ABS 2017d). Violence against men tends to be experienced from men in a public place; for women it takes place within the home.

Domestic and family violence is the Leading cause of illness, injury and disability for women aged 18-44 years old.

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High Level results here: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/domestic-violence/familydomestic-sexual-violence-in-australia-2018/contents/summary>

None of these claims are relevant to the question being asked about the proportions of male and female victims in Australia.

The ABC went on to ask the following question in response to Domestic Violence NSW's answers above:

Does the highlighted statistic below (from your response) mean that Bettina Arndt is correct in saying that 1 in 3 victims of domestic violence is male?

“From 2016 research, of the 29,227 recorded incidents of domestic violence assaults between April 2015 and March 2016, 69.54% of victims were female and 80.96% of alleged offenders were male.”

Domestic Violence NSW responded as follows:

Any act of violence is an abhorrent act. We do not, and must not ignore violence against men. DVNSW focuses on the service, support and Legal response to women because they experience violence in such devastating numbers and with such devastating consequences.

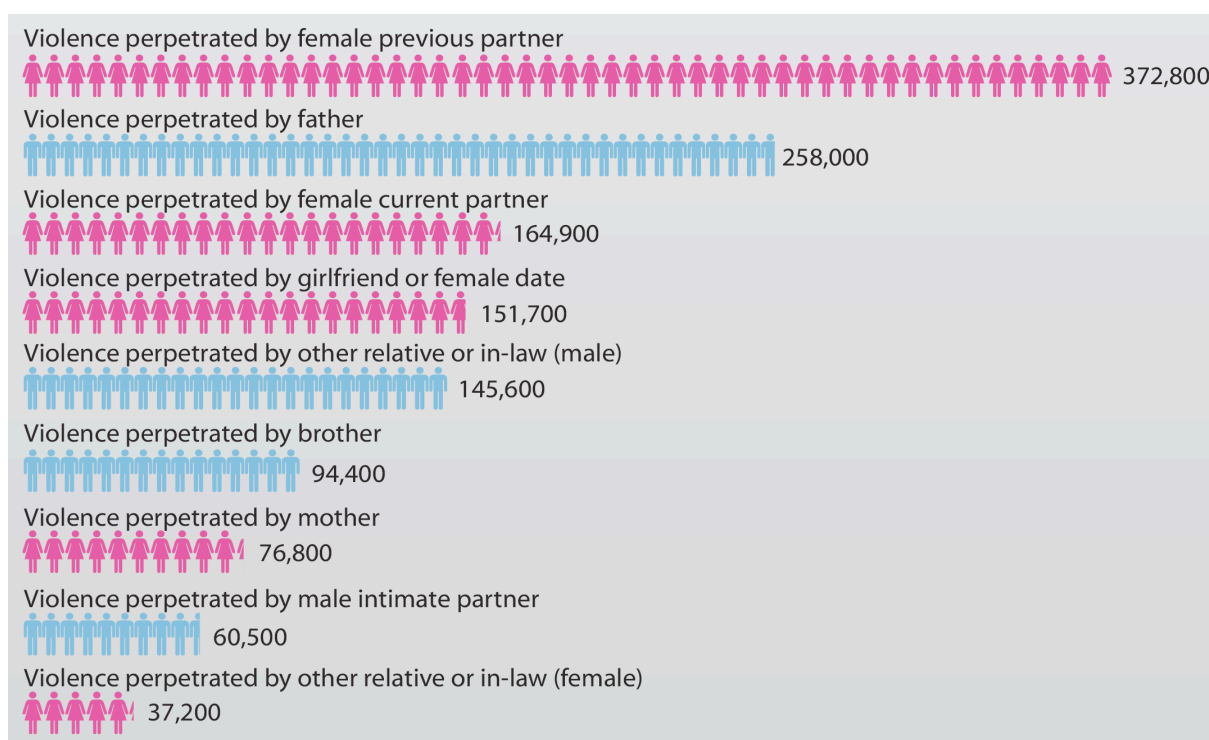
This claim is irrelevant to the question asked. The comment that “we do not... ignore violence against men” is hard to reconcile with the relative [lack of services](#) available to male victims of family and domestic violence compared to female victims; and the government [policies](#) directing the major national domestic violence telephone support lines to assume that heterosexual men who call claiming to be the victim of intimate partner violence, are actually likely to be the perpetrator.

We also reject the unstated proposition that male victims are always the victim of female violence. The statistic does not reveal that men's inclusion on these figures are assaults where men use violence against other men, and the victim is often another family member coming to the aid of the intended victim - the female partner of the perpetrator. This nuanced context is important and not a story revealed simply by the raw numbers.

There is no unstated proposition that male victims are always the victim of female violence. The question asked was about the gender breakdown of victims only – it said nothing about the gender breakdown of perpetrators. Nevertheless, the ABS PSS [found](#) that, while a greater percentage of males experienced violence from an intimate partner or family member of the same sex than did females, the majority of males experienced family violence perpetrated by a female.

The perpetrators of family violence against males by gender, ranked in order of prevalence, were as follows:

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Conclusion

We are extremely concerned that three of the top government-funded domestic violence organisations in Australia felt the need to dispute Ms Arndt's claim, based on robust data from the ABS and multiple other sources, that at least a third of victims of domestic violence are male.

There is no need to attack, downplay or minimise the experience of male victims in order to support female victims. In the eleven years One in Three has been operating, we have consistently advocated for increased support for female victims of family and domestic violence, alongside our calls for better awareness of and support for male victims.

We believe our society has the capacity to support all victims of family violence, whether young or old, male or female, gay or straight, rich or poor, wherever they live.

Greg Andresen
Senior Researcher
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