

Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public life and relationships

Violence against women is preventable. To stop this violence before it starts, we need to address the social conditions that drive it – the four gendered drivers. **Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence** is one of these drivers, where women's autonomy in both public life and private relationships is constrained. This can include undermining of women's decision-making and leadership in public life, or relationships where men control a woman's personal, financial or social independence.

What this driver can sound like

In the workplace, men make more capable bosses than women
(14% of Australians agree)*

Women prefer a man to be in charge of the relationship
(25% of Australians agree)*

Men make better political leaders than women
(14% of Australians agree)*

*ANROWS, (2018). *Australians' attitudes to violence against women and gender equality. Findings from the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS)*, Sydney, NSW.

What are the gendered drivers?

The evidence base tells us that gender inequality creates the social conditions for violence against women to occur. There are four key expressions of gender inequality that have been found to predict or drive this violence. To prevent violence against women, we must focus our efforts on addressing these drivers.¹

1. Condoning of violence against women
2. **Men's control of decision making and limits to women's independence in public life and relationships**
3. Rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity
4. Male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women.

What men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence looks like in daily life

Addressing different levels and contexts in prevention

Looking at how this driver manifests within different settings where people live, learn, work, socialise and play can help you to plan your approach to addressing it. The more that women's independence and decision-making is promoted in public and private life as well as across society, the more influence and positive change we will see.



Societal level

The widely held belief that men should take control in relationships and be the head of the household (16% of Australians agree with this statement).²

Women's portrayal in entertainment and the media – women and girls are often represented only through their relationship or connection to male protagonists, rather than as their own independent/multi-dimensional characters.

Institutional / systemic level

The underrepresentation of women in Parliament and other positions of political representation.

Female-dominated industries such as health and human services work and education having significantly lower levels of pay than male-dominated industries and occupations.³

Organisational / community level

Men's dominance of leadership roles in organisations and community groups, even in female-dominated industries.⁴

Workplaces failing to offer adequate flexible working arrangements for women and men, such as working from home and part time roles, making it more difficult for women to stay in employment after having children.

Expectations that the man in a heterosexual relationship is the primary earner and he should control decisions about expenditure, assets and bank accounts.

Individual / relationship level

Men's dominance of speaking time, and both men and women interrupting women during meetings more frequently than they do men.

How can we change this?

To prevent violence against women we must take action to address the gendered drivers.

Actions that will prevent violence against women:

1. CHALLENGE

condoning of violence against women

2. PROMOTE

women's independence and decision-making

3. CHALLENGE

gender stereotypes and roles

4. STRENGTHEN

positive, equal and respectful relationships

To address men's control in decision-making and limits to women's independence we must **promote women's independence and decision-making in public life and in their relationships**. This means supporting women's leadership (in all its forms), autonomy and social connectedness, and challenging the norms, practices and structures that enable and perpetuate men's control and dominance across different levels of society.⁵ Sometimes these are justified as 'how things have always been done'.

Promoting alternatives could include:

- offering leadership training and mentoring programs for women both in communities and in workplaces
- providing opportunities for women to establish social networks
- implementing workplace gender equality strategies such as promoting flexible work arrangements for both men and women
- introducing workplace gender quotas for leadership.

¹ Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth, (2015). *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*, Melbourne, Australia.

² ANROWS, (2018). *Australians' attitudes to violence against women and gender equality. Findings from the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS)*, Sydney, NSW.

³ Workplace Gender Equality Agency, (2018). *Gender Equity Insights 2018: Inside Australia's Gender Pay Gap*. Retrieved from <https://www.wgea.gov.au/data/wgea-research/gender-equity-insights-inside-australias-gender-pay-gap>.

⁴ Workplace Gender Equality Agency, (2016). *Gender Segregation in Australia's workforce*. Retrieved from https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/20160801_Industry_occupational_segregation_factsheet.pdf.

⁵ Our Watch, (2017). *Putting the prevention of violence against women into practice: How to Change the story*, Melbourne, Australia.