

# Many young people blame female victims, excuse male aggressors, according to report

November 25 2015, by Michelle Grattan

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As the government and opposition seek strategies to address domestic violence, new research shows many young people are likely to blame victims and tolerate males behaving aggressively.

Commissioned by the Department of Social Services, the research concluded that ingrained attitudes and beliefs – among both the young and those who influence them, including parents – mean tackling the problem "will be a very significant undertaking", despite the fact that Australians overwhelmingly condemn domestic violence.

Two women a week are currently killed in Australia by current or former partners; so far this year 78 have died. The issue has been prominent on the political agenda in 2015, especially promoted by Australian of the Year Rosie Batty and taken up across the political spectrum.

In a speech to mark White Ribbon Day, Opposition Leader Bill Shorten announced that a Labor government would provide for five days paid domestic violence leave to be in the National Employment Standards.

The report, [Reducing violence against women and their children](#), was prepared by the firm Taylor Nelson Sofres, and included qualitative and quantitative components. The research was conducted with [young males](#) and females and those who influence them. These included parents, siblings, teachers, sporting coaches, managers and community leaders across Australia. It also covered culturally and linguistically diverse people and Indigenous communities, and interviews with service

providers.

It found that, when presented with a hypothetical scenario, many young males externalise [bad behaviour](#) by blaming others, while many young females internalise bad experiences by blaming themselves.

Many actions involving disrespectful and [aggressive behaviour](#) are seen by adults as social misdemeanours rather than as something needing correction and modification.

"There is a strong desire to avoid blaming males, and a sense that participating in these behaviours is a rite of passage that should be understood rather than addressed. There is little empathy towards the female experience," the report says. "Many potentially influential Australians fail to reconcile their role in perpetuating the situation."

The report says that boys as young as ten can blame victims, quoting one male aged between ten and 14 saying "she said something that he didn't like ... the girls were being mean". Girls from an early age show their tendency to minimise gender inequality and aggressive male behaviour, with one aged between ten and 14 saying "it wasn't that bad ... It's not like he punched her".

A similar pattern is evident among those who influence the young. Most, when presented with vignettes, automatically questioned the female's role before rebuking the behaviour. A father said, "his daughter must have done something wrong". A mother asked, "what did the girl do?"

The report is to help in the development of a national campaign against [domestic violence](#). The Council of Australian Governments has endorsed having a jointly funded A\$30 million campaign.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said the research was a "wake-up

call". He said that "one of the most important things we must do as parents and indeed as grandparents is to ensure that our sons and our grandsons respect their sisters and mothers and their grandmothers".

Social Services Minister Christian Porter, a former crown prosecutor, said there was a clear under-appreciation in many parts of Australian society of what actually constituted unacceptable conduct towards women.

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