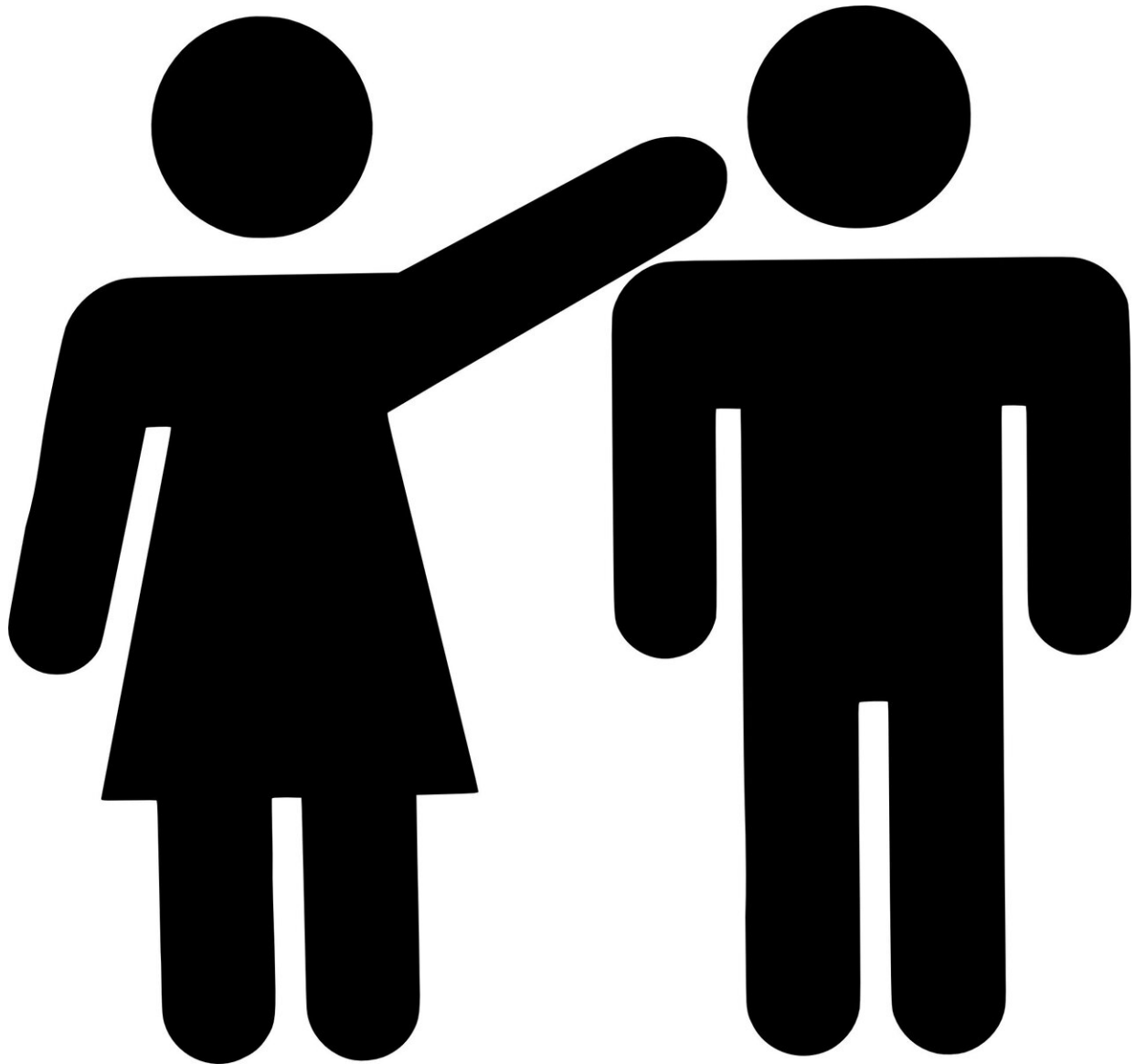


Exploring the reasons some women use force

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In the context of family relationships, women who use force generally do so because they want power rather than because they have power, according to new research.

The study found [women](#) wish to assert their personal independence from a partner, rather than exercise personal authority over a partner (coercive control).

Women who use [force](#) commonly also see themselves as responsible for their actions, and often for their relationships as well. In contrast, men using [violence](#) generally do not, blaming others rather than themselves.

Led by researchers at the University of Melbourne and Curtin University, in collaboration with non-for-profit organizations, Baptcare and Berry Street, this is the first Australian research to examine women who use force.

It is released today by the Department of Social Services, and includes a literature review, a study of workforce knowledge and understanding of this group of women across Australia, an international review of existing interventions, the evaluation of a group-based intervention, and a framework outlining key principles of intervention with this group of women.

The research found most women identified as using force are themselves victim-survivors of domestic family violence (DFV). There is strong evidence that women who use force have experienced high rates of DFV and childhood abuse or victimization.

It also revealed women use more psychological, verbal and emotional force than other kinds. Physical force, when used, is more likely to be minor or moderate, rather than severe.

Motivations for the use of force by women most commonly include self-defense, retaliation, anger and stress.

University of Melbourne Dr. Margaret Kertesz said while there is now a considerable body of literature about men's violence against women, the issue of women's use of force remains a complex and controversial issue.

"Our work highlights the urgency of increasing community understanding of women's experiences of trauma, abuse and violence, and how these experiences shape women's relationships and conflict-resolution skills," Dr. Kertesz said.

University of Melbourne Professor Cathy Humphreys said professionals in a range of sectors report that in their work they regularly encounter women who use force and identify it most commonly because women are upfront about their behavior.

"However, the workforce survey showed us that there is a wide range of views about women's use of force. Professionals vary in their understanding of what motivates women to act in this way, and the extent to which women's use of force differs from men's violence," Dr. Humphreys said.

"There is a considerable need to increase the capacity of services and workers to respond effectively to women who use force and ensure there's a strong Australian knowledge base and ongoing education."

The researchers found a small number of programs have emerged in Australia in the last decade that specifically respond to women identified as using force, providing an intervention tailored to their needs.

One of the first, Positive SHIFT, is a groupwork-based intervention developed and run in Victoria by Baptistcare in collaboration with Berry

Street, two organizations providing services to families affected by domestic and family violence.

"While professionals can listen with empathy, advocate and facilitate healing, women are experts in their own situation and can work to evaluate and develop safe and viable alternatives to their use of force," Dr. Kertesz said.

"This is something that we found Positive SHIFT does well, allowing participants to gain an understanding of how their life experience shapes their actions, and learning strategies to deal with the difficult relationships in their lives."

Dr. Kertesz stressed the importance of identifying gaps in the understanding and treatment of family violence, no matter who the perpetrator is.

"As we continue the work to prevent men's violence against women as the most prevalent form of domestic and family violence in our community, we must always be sensitive to the nuances of experience in the lives of those using force or violence, whoever they are," she said.

Provided by University of Melbourne

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