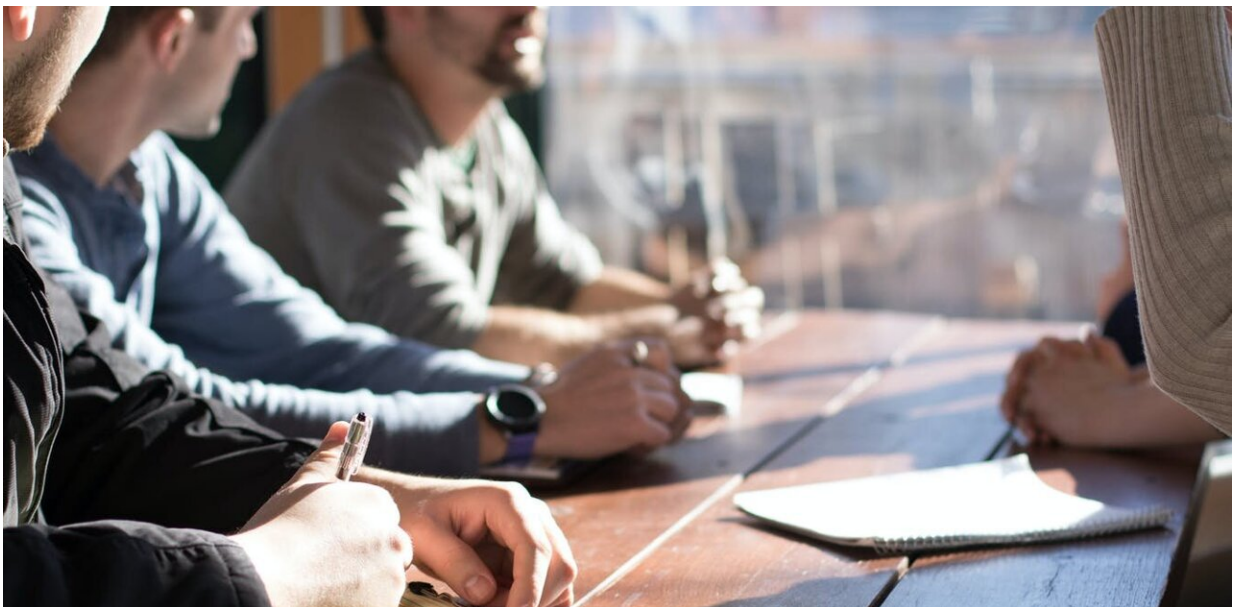


# Not all men's violence prevention programs are effective: Why women's voices need to be included

September 27 2021, by Chay Brown, Desmond Campbell

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In the opening panel of the National Summit on Women's Safety 2021, Professor Marcia Langton called for a separate national plan to address violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Other panels spoke about the importance of perpetrator interventions and engaging men and boys in prevention, particularly those that engage

with Aboriginal men. Such programs are important but if they are not based in appropriate frameworks they can be dangerous.

In research conducted between 2018-2020, ten principles of good practice to prevent violence against women were identified through [case studies](#) of two Northern Territory programs addressing men's violence. These principles were developed with practitioners in a series of workshops. One of the areas of focus was accountability for men who use violence.

## **Men's behavior change programs in the Northern Territory**

Men's behavior change programs respond to violence by working with men who have used violence. Other programs seek to engage men and boys as allies in violence prevention.

Currently there are only two behavior change programs in the Northern Territory and very few programs that engage men and boys in violence prevention. More are desperately needed.

However it is not enough to simply have these programs—they must be safe and effective.

Approximately 300 Northern Territorians contributed to the development of principles of good practice to prevent violence against women. These have been communicated in a framework called ["Hopeful, Together, Strong"](#).

These principles of good practice show that to be effective programs must be:

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## **A study of two programs that work with men**

The first program studied is the Marra'ka Mbarintja Men's Behavior Change program run by [Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation](#) in Mparntwe/Alice Springs. This men's behavior change program is for Aboriginal and non-Indigenous men who have used violence.

The study found this men's behavior change program was promising and showed evidence of assisting the community to move through the stages of change.

Particular strengths of this program were its culturally safe approach, its use of assertive outreach, its emphasis on women and children's safety and holding men accountable for their use of violence.

This program has since developed [Central Australian Minimum Standards](#) for men's behavior change programs. Despite the promising indications of program effectiveness, this program is under-funded, under-staffed, and under-resourced.

The second program studied will not be named to allow them the

opportunity to put in place the research recommendations. This prevention program seeks to engage men in violence prevention by delivering training and sessions to Aboriginal and non-Indigenous men in regional and remote Northern Territory communities. In an effort to raise awareness, this program educates men about different types of violence.

Despite being well-funded, well-intended, and having a strong geographical reach, the research found this prevention program to be ineffective and often collusive with men's violence against women. This was due to program staff having no expertise or training in domestic, family and sexual violence.

This led staff to minimizing and/or condoning men's use of violence in training sessions and using language like "women are just as bad."

This is an inaccurate claim, considering women are nearly [three times more likely](#) to experience intimate partner violence than men; [almost ten women a day](#) are hospitalized from assault by a partner; and Indigenous women are hospitalized due to family violence at [three times the rate](#) of Indigenous males.

Therefore this program's training sessions often reinforced harmful and incorrect attitudes and beliefs which could drive further violence against women.

Comparing these two vastly different programs highlights the importance of minimum standards for programs working with men to prevent violence. Appropriate frameworks for these programs need to be built from evidence about what works, particularly in remote communities and alongside First Nations people.

If not conducted correctly, programs working with men can put women

and children at continued risk. Funding and support should be directed to programs that can show evidence of being grounded in frameworks of good practice.

## **The importance of community-driven programs**

Prioritizing the safety of women and children must be at the forefront of everything any men's [program](#) does. This includes elevating the voices of survivors and the inclusion of women in leadership. In particular, the perspectives of Aboriginal women must inform these programs, and Aboriginal people and communities must have decision-making roles in their governance.

When women's voices are not included, there is no chance to model gender equality in relationships. In the case of men's behavior change programs, without women's insights, the opportunity for accurately monitoring and assessing risks has been lost. If only the man's assessment of risk is heard, there is no way to tell if the potential for violence is escalating. This can lead to staff minimizing a man's use of violence.

Staff employed in these programs working with men must be given comprehensive, ongoing training. This is to minimize the risk of collusion and to empower staff to challenge men's use of or justification of violence. Understanding why some men minimize and justify their behavior is a skill that specialist facilitators constantly work at. They need to balance holding men accountable within a non-shaming and non-judgemental space so men are able to explore and take ownership of their behavior.

Programs working with men must also address additional drivers of violence against Aboriginal women, such as the ongoing impacts of colonization on Indigenous people and communities. Programs must be

equipped with an understanding of intergenerational trauma and how colonization has undermined gender roles and relations in First Nations communities, and respond to the gendered impacts of these compounding traumas.

The ongoing impacts of colonization on non-Indigenous people and society also [drives violence](#) against Indigenous women. Colonization has created systems and structures which privilege non-Indigenous people and reinforces power imbalances between them and Indigenous people. Programs working with men must therefore take an intersectional approach, and in addition to gendered drivers, address structural and racist violence.

We must also engage men and boys in preventing violence against women. On day two of the Women's Safety Summit, Thelma Schwartz expressed the sentiment that men are not always the problem, they can be the solution.

The ANROWS [Warawarni-gu guma statement](#) says: "We invite our men, our brothers, uncles and cultural leaders to stand with us, to come together to work on solutions for us all, our young ones, our men and [women](#) together."

A good example of this is the partnership between Darwin Indigenous Men's Service and the Darwin Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Shelter. This partnership shows how communities can work together to break the cycle of violence.

However, such local strategies are rarely given the opportunity to build their capacity and become effective programs, through a lack of government support.

To create and support community-led [violence](#) prevention programs,

Indigenous people must be involved in conducting the research and informing what is best practice in their respective communities. Kinship and traditional Aboriginal family structures and ways of maintaining relationships, must be integrated into these practices.

We need place-based models, conceived, designed, and delivered *by* the community *for* the community.

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Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Not all men's violence prevention programs are effective: Why women's voices need to be included (2021, September 27) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-09-men-violence-effective-women-voices.html>

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