

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria

Melbourne—Monday 12 August 2024

MEMBERS

Ella George – Chair

Annabelle Cleeland – Deputy Chair

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WITNESSES

Joshua Lourensz, Executive Director, Catholic Social Services Victoria; and

Matt Tyler, Executive Director, Community and Systems Impact, Jesuit Social Services.

The CHAIR: Good afternoon. My name is Ella George, and I am the Chair of the Legislative Assembly's Legal and Social Issues Committee. We will now resume public hearings of the Committee's Inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria.

I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin nation, and I pay my respects to their elders past, present and future and extend that respect to First Nations people across Victoria.

I am joined today by my colleagues Jackson Taylor, the Member for Bayswater; Meng Heang Tak, the Member for Clarinda; Christine Couzens, the Member for Geelong; Annabelle Cleeland, Deputy Chair and Member for Euroa; and Chris Crewther, the Member for Mornington.

The Committee recognises that evidence to this inquiry may be distressing, and we urge people to reach out for support. You can contact Lifeline on 13 11 14, 1800RESPECT or the Blue Knot helpline on 1300 657 380.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live. While all evidence taken by the Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege, comments repeated outside this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of today's transcript to check, together with any questions taken on notice. Verified transcripts, responses to questions taken on notice and other documents provided during the hearing will be published on the Committee's website.

I am now pleased to welcome Joshua Lourensz, Executive Director of Catholic Social Services Victoria, and Matt Tyler, Executive Director, Community and Systems Impact, Jesuit Social Services. I invite you to make a brief opening statement, and this will be followed by questions from members. Thank you.

Matt TYLER: Thank you, Ella. And thank you to you all for holding this really important inquiry. I would like to join you by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting and pay my respects to elders past and present. Also, noting the topic we are discussing today, I acknowledge victim-survivors of family violence who have joined us today as well as victim-survivors who are tuning in online. Ella, I will share a brief opening statement on behalf of Jesuit Social Services, then Josh will do the same and then we will look forward to questions.

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to respond to this inquiry and commends the Committee for holding it. We are a social change organisation working to build a just society, and we have worked with boys and men in particular for over 45 years, including violent and sex offenders. Our central message as it relates to this inquiry is this: to reduce all forms of violence and ultimately to end violence, we need a better understanding of perpetration.

Given the understandable public attention on family violence, including the crucial royal commission in Victoria, there are astounding gaps in knowledge about perpetrators. As it stands, we do not have reliable answers to a number of fundamental questions. Firstly, how many men in Australia have perpetrated violence, including the type of violence, severity, frequency and motivations for the behaviour? Secondly, how is perpetration changing over time? Third, what are the factors that impact a reduction or an increase in perpetration? Fourth, who is at greater risk of perpetrating violence? And finally, how many of these men want help to address their violence, and how would they like to access this help?

We have some information to address these questions from police and from surveys of victims, although it is incomplete. There is significant information held by organisations working with victim-survivors regarding perpetration, which I know Josh will talk further to. As the victim-survivor statement as part of the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children* states:

Abuse and violence is a problem for victims, but it is not the victims' problem.

And yet as it stands, the very way we define this problem fails to bring the perpetrator into view. For instance—and these are statistics that this panel will know well—two in five women have experienced violence since the age of 15, one in three women has experienced physical violence since the age of 15, and one in five women has experienced sexual violence since the age of 15. These are statistics from the ABS's personal safety survey,

and they are crucial. By no means should improved data on perpetration be seen as a replacement for this information.

However, consider these statistics from our 2024 Man Box research completed in partnership with Respect Victoria, based on a representative sample of over 3,500 Australian men: 28%, almost one in three men aged 18 to 30 have used at least one of eight forms of physical or sexual violence against a current or former partner. This violence included pushing or shoving a partner, 11.3%; forcing a partner to do something sexual that is degrading or humiliating, 10.4%; having sexual intercourse with a partner when they were afraid of what you might do, 10.4%; slapping or throwing something that could hurt them, 9%; choking or burning a partner on purpose, 8.5%; physically forcing a partner to have sexual intercourse with you when they did not want to, 8.4%; hitting a partner with your fist or something else that could hurt them, 8.3%; and kicking, dragging or beating a partner up, 7.7%. So over 1 million men aged 18 to 30 have engaged in at least one of these really extreme forms of behaviour, and they are telling us about it through the research that we have done.

I should note that the research I have just referred to was not a perpetration study, although it did collect some data on perpetration. Many gaps remain. However, with this data on the prevalence of these behaviours we can set our mind to addressing the enormity of the perpetration that exists in our country, the overwhelming majority of which will never come to the attention of the justice system. As survivor advocate Lula Dembele has said, these men using violence are those that we like, know and love.

To make progress we have got to overcome barriers to the collection of data on perpetration, including a lack of government funding. All of our work to date as it relates to perpetration has been philanthropically funded. We are encouraged by recent investments by ANROWS in a perpetration study focused on New South Wales. We also have to overcome discomfort amongst survey companies related to questions about perpetration, ambiguity related to mandatory reporting and a lack of national guidance regarding research on perpetration. Thanks very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Joshua LOURENSZ: I join with Matt in saying thanks for hearing us and thanks for taking the submissions. Thanks to every one of you for running this inquiry; it is such an important piece of work.

I am just acknowledging the traditional owners. Catholic Social Services Victoria continue to commit ourselves to reconciliation in whatever shape and form that takes going forward. Reconciliation often has certain connotations given the context. In this kind of work, this is something that the Catholic Social Services Victoria domestic violence working group—when we saw this inquiry come about and we were reading the terms of reference—thought was something we needed to contribute to. That draws from across 40 of our member organisations, some I think who have given evidence individually, trying to work up what is the potential of this piece of work. We are talking about data on perpetrators and how this fits into the work that services do.

In saying that, I just wanted to make sure—we are really pleased to see it, but what I bring today from across our membership is from a service perspective, and we know that this issue cuts through all kinds of areas of society. Perpetrators can be found everywhere, as per the stats that Matt was even saying. It is so disturbing, but from a social services lens we see a particular group of people. Our members serve 300,000 Victorians every year collectively, and so the information, the kind of comorbidities and the complexity of life comes from that perspective. I think that is really key to keep in mind going forward. Our members were really encouraged in that a lot of them work with women and have worked with women victim-survivors for so long, and there has been this move to and appreciation of ever since our working group formed up in 2015 thinking about how we see accountability shift from this work of trying to hold victim-survivors in this time of immeasurable distress, and focus on how we hold perpetrators to account. I also appreciate the fact that they are people too and reconciliation needs to happen. We do not want to see people made homeless, we do not want to see people go down a path of destitution; we want to prioritise the important work that our members do of supporting victim-survivors of family and domestic violence while also not seeing accountabilities taken and people able to be supported to change. We want to see a Victoria that is profoundly different from the one that we have now. So this building of data about this group, perpetrators, is something we see as really important.

The data that is gathered and is pointed to in our written contribution—there is so much data held by so many of our member agencies, but it is hard. Across our membership we have got 10 very large members and

30 small ones, with a variety of ability to sift through, understand and then change praxis—the feedback of continuous improvement. So it is just important to recognise that although there are some key things that are consistent in our submission that we found, and in the consultations that led up to that submission, there is a variety of abilities to change practice and work, but the desire is there. I think that was very, very clear from the outset.

We want to acknowledge that the work that has been done for so long has been done in the context often of really finite resources. That is just the reality of our sector; we know that well and it has continued in spite of that. I also want to acknowledge the role the Victorian Multicultural Commission has played over the past few years, particularly since the Royal Commission into Family Violence, who saw faith communities as being core partners in the work of prevention of family and domestic violence and working with perpetrators of violence—mainly men. Over 50% of Victorians are religious in some way, shape or form, so that approach that is, ‘All right, we need to work together to see this end. We need to see people change’—they really pioneered that in a number of ways and continue to support that work across faith communities. That is a really important part—in a partnership form, not a point-the-finger form, but we are in this together and we must change.

I think the quote that Matt quoted from Lula Dembele, that these are men ‘we like, know and love’, also is a terrifying reality. But it is also a strength in that we do know we need to find out more about people, we need to find out what works and what allows people to change, and we need to focus in on that, while keeping the voice and desires of victim-survivors central to this work. Often through the service set, like so many of our organisations that are working with victim-survivors, they gather elements of that voice through writing safety plans, finding out about the person who has perpetrated violence towards them or people. So it is really important to centre on their experience through this as we gather data. Thanks for having us here today to get into this.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Matt, in your opening statement you spoke to perpetration that does not come to the attention of the justice system and that is certainly a common theme that we have heard from other witnesses about how you can capture data on family violence that is not reported. You also spoke about your work with the Man Box surveys. I am just wondering what your recommendation to the Victorian Government would be about how we can better capture data on non-reported family violence and that wider understanding of perpetration in the community.

Matt TYLER: Thank you for the question, Ella. I think the question you are asking is fundamental to how we tackle family violence. Josh touched on the importance of bringing the perpetrator into view in order to facilitate accountability and in order to do that we have got to understand the problem that we are seeking to solve. I think the way to do that, or an important way to do that, is we have got data from the justice system, from police. We have got really important data—and I use the term ‘data’ broadly: quantitative and qualitative data—from victim-survivors, and we have got really important data from organisations who are working with victim-survivors. What we do not have is quantitative data from an anonymous survey of a representative sample of the Victorian and for that matter Australian population.

The Man Box research that I touched on: the reason why we collected data on prevalence was to understand the extent to which a range of attitudes, violent supportive attitudes and stereotypical ideas about what it means to be a man, are linked to a range of life outcomes. We sought to understand how many men had engaged in one of eight really extreme forms of physical or sexual violence against a partner. The gaps that remain, Ella, include questions around frequency, severity and motivation. Based on perpetration research in other countries as well as more recent perpetration research here in Australia, we know if surveys are anonymous that men will tell you. Most recently in the research funded by ANROWS, completed by Dr Asher Flynn and Dr Anastasia Powell, which looked at workplace-facilitated sexual harassment, one in four men in that study told the researchers they were doing it to frighten the person that they were targeting. An additional one in four told the researchers that they were doing it to humiliate the person that they were targeting. Questions around motivation need to be addressed also through qualitative work, but they can be addressed through survey work.

Certainly prevalence needs to be addressed through anonymous survey work. Having a better understanding of prevalence I think needs to then inform the Victorian Government’s response. If one in three women are reporting victimisation, it is reasonable to expect, ballpark, one in three men are perpetrating, and we have seen that: 28% are perpetrating. You need to have a response that is commensurate with that, and I am not sure at this stage that there is recognition regarding the scale of this problem. It is the reason why I quoted Lula’s

reflection, that these are men we like, know and love. This is a really significant challenge that is not just about the smaller number that come to the attention of the justice system.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Matt. Joshua, would you like to add anything to that?

Joshua LOURENSZ: Yes. Just to the point that the service sector sees only a percentage, it is an important percentage because it is multiple levels of disadvantage. We have seen through other areas that people that come to the attention of services have multiple things going on for them. I think that is just important to note.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Annabelle.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Thank you. I wanted to ask, following on from your comments just then, Matt, who would be best placed to conduct this research, and why are you focused on the perpetrator and potentially not the victim? I ask that because we have had some evidence about the language used in a potential survey, and whether people are aware it is violence is one of the challenges.

Matt TYLER: Thank you for the question, Annabelle. I think in terms of our focus, our focus is absolutely on the victim. In order to prevent family violence and therefore prevent further victims of violence, we have got to understand perpetration. So I do not see this as a focus on the victim or a focus on the perpetrator. The voices of victim-survivors, as Josh has emphasised, must be central to this work. I note that there are many victim-survivors who are saying that we do not sufficiently understand perpetration. This is fundamentally about preventing further victimisation. In terms of who is best placed to complete the research, probably rather than identify an organisation, I would identify the capabilities. I think you have got to have really strong research credentials. It has got to be survivor led, so you have got to have voices of victim-survivors who are shaping the way the research proceeds. I think, given the wonderfully diverse country that Australia is, you have got to have the voices of First Nations Australians and culturally and linguistically diverse Australians. There is going to be a significant amount of work with regard to survey design in particular. And then you have got to have people who bring an understanding of perpetration. So separate from research methods and expertise around designing and administering surveys, you have got to have practice experience—people who have worked with perpetrators of violence. Now I may have missed some capabilities there, but I think that is some of what you would need in order to do this work successfully.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Independent from government or integrated with?

Matt TYLER: My view would be it needs to be funded by government. It is resource-intensive work. I touched on the fact we have done the two pieces of research which collected data on perpetration. One was the Man Box research. The second was in partnership with the UNSW to understand perpetration of child sexual abuse. Both had relatively modest funding, and when you have modest funding it has got implications for what you are able to do. I look in contrast to the really important work completed on the Australian Child Maltreatment Study. That was in the millions of dollars, and it has made an extraordinary contribution to our understanding of victimisation. So I think it takes resources. I do think that the entity that conducts the research needs to be independent of government, and that is primarily because with the anonymous nature of the data collection I think there is more likely to be trust if that is coming from an entity that is independent from government. We know that that is a really important aspect of encouraging people to, firstly, participate but then secondly, to be honest in their responses, noting that it will be highly imperfect. I mean, there are things you can do to adjust for the fact that people are likely to under-report. Again, it is not to say that we get a perfect method, but I think having an entity independent from government is important.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Did you want to add anything, Josh? Pretty good?

Joshua LOURENSZ: Just that you said, ‘Are people aware of violence?’ Definitely in the work that our members have done in the prevention space or even what Catholic Social Services Victoria have done, we are after cultural and social change. That is why we have got the data for—to change. I think that is really key to this. The research that does go ahead has to be somewhat guided towards—this is beyond a service response. This is a cultural and social change piece of work, and that is why I think, to Matt’s point, government should be behind it but also any kind of service or civil society should be right there too.

Annabelle CLEELAND: With the Man Box research—it might be duplicating what Ella said—are there any particular learnings with the style of questions, the length, the responses, anything that you would bring to this survey based on what you have already experienced?

Matt TYLER: Yes. I think there is so much.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Yes, sorry. It is loaded.

Matt TYLER: Yes, there is so much. So a few things: one is in an Australian context it is relatively early stages as it relates to collecting data on perpetration, and we really felt that. As we engaged with organisations that had the potential to partner with us as part of collecting the data, there was a really diverse range of levels of comfort, noting that we had ethics approval. That is taken as given. There are guidelines around conducting ethical research. This is not a critique of any one survey company; I think this is just a reflection of where we are at with regard to asking questions about really uncomfortable topics, and I deliberately included the eight questions we asked because they are really disturbing. They are really uncomfortable and extreme forms of behaviour, and I think there needs to be an acknowledgement that survey companies who might be worried about reputational risk understandably have questions around mandatory reporting.

There is likely to be the need for national guidance to provide some direction about how to complete research on perpetration. That will be helpful for the people completing the work, it will be helpful for governments funding the work and it will be helpful for survey companies who have a responsibility to collect that data. This goes a bit to the questions that are asked, to the extent this might be relevant, but there is ambiguity around mandatory reporting: to what extent is there a responsibility to report? If you are asking questions that could have impacts on risks to children, the data is anonymous; it is being collected for research purposes. So there is a question there around making sure that governments—and this is likely state and territory governments given where this legislation sits—provide clear direction as to expectations around mandatory reporting when conducting perpetration research. I think they are two really significant questions that need to be resolved in order to see perpetration research conducted at the scale that it needs to be conducted.

I think the third thing I would say is the questions should be behaviourally based. There will be different understandings of concepts like coercive control and different understandings of concepts like violence. This is where the capabilities of people involved in the research need to go to behaviours, where there is less likely to be ambiguity about what is meant when asking the question.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Can it be extended to young people? Could you see this research being extended to youth?

Matt TYLER: I heard Elena's testimony a moment ago. I think in principle, yes. I think there are ethical guidelines around conducting research with young people that need to be foregrounded, and I think the bar around what is required goes up significantly, so there is significant nuance. But in principle, yes, because we know that the beginnings of perpetration oftentimes emanate at a really early age. So if we are not understanding pathways to perpetration, that has got implications for the extent to which we can intervene. We have got 28% of men telling us that they are using violence; that is aged between 18 to 30. We also know from our research to understand child sexual abuse that there are opportunities to ask adults about their experience as young people. You can also understand pathways by asking adults: were you accessing illegal online material when you were under the age of 18? So there is an opportunity to understand the experiences of young people by asking adults. But yes, in principle—I think we need to find ways to engage with young people on this research, noting that the way we do that will be different because they are not adults.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks. Did you want to add anything further, Josh? Great. I just have one quick follow-up from some of the things that Annabelle has raised. Matt, you were speaking about the importance of a survey being conducted by a non-government entity to help build trust in that. Would you also recommend, say, multiple non-government entities help collect data on that survey—say, for example, a faith-based organisation speaking to members who share that faith or a culturally and linguistically diverse organisation speaking to their membership? Are you able to provide some feedback on an approach like that?

Matt TYLER: The honest answer, Ella, is I would have to give it some more thought. I will share a quick reflection—and I think, Josh, given the diversity of your membership, you have a view on this. My feeling would be that consolidating the entity who is responsible for running the survey would make sense just for clarity of who is responsible for actually completing the work. There is a separate question around engagement and making sure that the entity responsible for completing the survey—whether it is through an advisory group or whether it is through relationships, who they are working with, in order to increase participation in the survey—is able to engage with the communities that you have touched on.

I would also expect that as this work gains momentum there will be more than one study. It might be that there is a specific study on some of the specific questions that you are pointing to. That would be conducted by separate groups. So it depends a little bit upon the research questions and also to some extent on the method. I am not sure it goes directly to your question, but I think for clarity it makes sense for one entity to have responsibility but then make sure that they have got relationships with other organisations and community in order to facilitate the approach that they are setting out to achieve.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Matt.

Joshua LOURENSZ: I think in research there are always so many practicalities in trying to build the trust, so I will not comment further on that. But I will note that even looking at particular faith communities—looking at researching, not collecting data on perpetrators or surveying on that—the Anglican community, the national body, is the only Christian church in Australia I know of which has done a particular piece of work. That was around the Sydney area a couple of years ago, and they have published those results. It is hard work. I think it was really courageous of them to do that. That was to look at how many victim-survivors there were who were churchgoing Anglicans in Sydney dioceses, and they were able to report on that. Surprisingly or unsurprisingly, it is about the same as the general population of Australia, if not slightly higher on similar metrics to what we know more broadly. I think even capturing that and understanding how this came to be, what we are going to do about it—those are certainly conversations we have been a part of, and we have learnt a lot from the work of the Anglican Church in this area as we have gone about doing our own.

But to build trust and to have these pointy conversations with people and the anonymity and the unpacking of—everything that Matt said, which he knows more about—the idea of behaviours rather than terms like coercive control: unless you work in the sector, you might not be able to speak to that definition. So it is describing those behaviours, being brave enough and having strong leadership behind it, and that needs a collaborative approach. That is what we do know from all points. This is an issue. We are all in this. We want to see positive change. It is fundamentally against the tenets of Christianity and most major religions. These are things that are in conflict. To unpack that and do something about it together with the broader public will take a piece of work and leadership, I think, to bring it alongside. And that is what we have seen at the state level in Victoria. We saw the Victorian Multicultural Commission do that work after the royal commission to try and get that kind of spirit going, and I think that is what needs to be maintained.

Matt TYLER: Do you mind, Ella, if I—just prompted by what Josh has said—add one item? I think funding the translation and interpretation will be an important role for government. Oftentimes there is funding for completing the research, and yet for that principle of, almost regardless of which cultural group you are talking about, ‘nothing about us without us’, that will need subsequent funding. So if you are wanting to see this research translate into changes in what happens on the ground, you are going to have to fund organisations to work in partnership with the researchers who complete it subsequently.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Christine.

Chris COUZENS: Thank you both for your time today and your contribution. We really appreciate it. I am just trying to form this question in my head. You have talked about the research that has been done. I suppose this inquiry is around having a Victorian database or collecting data, and then comes the analysis and the research after that. You have got to collect the data, I suppose, to get to that point of research. From your view, how could that happen? Obviously funded organisations are required to collect data, and they do that, but there are a whole range of different systems that it is collected under. Assuming there was an overall data collection base, how would you imagine that that would happen in Victoria?

Matt TYLER: I think there are two bits to it. One probably sits more with me, and one sits more with Josh. There is one which is the potential for a piece of primary research which would seek to survey a representative sample of the population. That could be people of all genders, or it could be a more focused approach. We focused exclusively on men for our child sexual abuse perpetration study. Then there is a second—which, Josh, I might defer to you on—which is drawing on the data that already exists. Before jumping to those two, is your question about both or is it more about the latter, drawing on data that already exists?

Chris COUZENS: About both.

Matt TYLER: Both. All right. Are you happy, Josh, if I start on the primary –

Joshua LOURENSZ: Please.

Matt TYLER: On an approach which seeks to understand some of the questions I touched on up-front, including the prevalence of violence, I think it is likely that a really important part of that will be a piece of primary research that surveys a representative sample of the Victorian or Australian population to understand, essentially, their behaviours. For how that could look, I think we can point to some work that has already occurred, including the Man Box research which was done with Respect Victoria. But also more recently—I think in the last 12 months—we are seeing research on perpetration become more and more common. We have seen a study into technology-facilitated workplace abuse and also a study in the last four weeks or so by the Australian Institute of Criminology on the perpetration of sexual harassment and assault. From a methods perspective, in an Australian context this is more and more common, and there are also significant perpetration studies overseas. Broadly, these are anonymous surveys with research questions like ‘How many Australian men have perpetrated violence?’ and ‘What is the frequency, severity and motivation?’ And to your point, Christine, that can then be analysed to determine how perpetration is changing over time. As it stands at the moment, we have not really got good data to answer that question.

Then it can also be used to understand pathways into perpetration—so what are the risk factors that point to someone’s life trajectory? It is by no means deterministic, but we know that experience of violence as a child, either as a victim of violence or witnessing violence, can contribute to subsequent perpetration. Again, it is by no means deterministic, but to what extent is pornography playing a role? Without understanding pathways into perpetration, it is very hard then for a government to confidently say, ‘Yes, there is a regulatory role for government as it relates to pornography.’ Or to what extent have we got a response that is therapeutic with an explicit goal of making sure people who have witnessed or experienced violence do not go on to perpetrate violence? So this data could play a really important role in informing those types of responses. I might, Josh, go to you on that.

Chris COUZENS: Before that, you mentioned overseas studies. Are you aware of other studies that have been done? Can you provide that to the Committee?

Matt TYLER: Absolutely, yes.

Chris COUZENS: Great. Thank you.

Matt TYLER: I can follow that up.

Joshua LOURENSZ: I think just pulling up the deterministic thing is a key, especially from the services and any data that services hold. This happens. As we mentioned in our submission, it could be making safety plans for victim-survivors going out. We talked to a couple of hospitals. In particular I think Cabrini Health have a women-only mental health inpatient service, and 78% of women in there had violence used against them. Then there is the acknowledgement often with services that a whole bunch of things are going on for people. The thing is that these are not deterministic—that then people will perpetuate or use violence in their relationships—but they do often link up, all these elements. So I guess it is this slight challenge. I have often said, ‘How do we get the data and then do the analysis?’ I think they do actually need to come together a bit in that that data is so loaded. I just think of the work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission in this and what Maggie Walter said. What she has said is, ‘Numbers, configured as population or population sample data, are not neutral entities.’ And the way with the existing data that is out there—and there is plenty of it from our consultation with members—is that everyone is careful in that they want to make sure that this does paint a good, accurate story about how we go about positive change for Victoria and Victorians. And when we are

talking we are not talking about a broad range of things that are just a range of factors about someone, we are talking about perpetration of domestic and family violence. It is a very particular question we are asking, how we bring context to that, so I just urge that it is not just about the dataset, it is about really having a good understanding of how we get that and what other experiences—and I think in our submission we outlined a range of other things—we would suggest you ask about alongside that. Although perhaps it is easier to add a tick box to SHIP—the way we get all the data on homelessness services or whatever—we would urge good research, particularly with people who have done a lot of work on this, to think about how we frame it up so we can best use it to do the change work that we need to do.

Chris COUZENS: Great.

Matt TYLER: Can I add one more thing, Christine?

Chris COUZENS: Yes.

Matt TYLER: One of the things that can at times be raised as it relates to the primary research on perpetration is that people will not tell the truth. I will follow up with those studies, but I think we have got certainly enough evidence to say that it is not the case that if it is an anonymous survey people will tell the truth. There are also approaches, including—and it is simple, but we have seen it work for the work we have done—if you ask people whether or not they have told the truth, many people will tell you if they have not. Even if they have lied on the survey, they will tell you, ‘Yes, I actually haven’t told the truth,’ and you can then remove that from your sample. We remove thousands of responses because of that. So there are approaches, noting that it will be imperfect and they are still likely to some extent under-report, that you can use to account for that.

Chris COUZENS: Great. Just quickly—I am conscious of time—how could the government best ensure consistent outcome evaluations across Victoria in the men’s behaviour change programs?

Matt TYLER: And so you are jumping from research on perpetration to –

Chris COUZENS: Yes, this is a different question.

Joshua LOURENSZ: Evaluation of.

Matt TYLER: This is a bigger—yes, I see. That is a really big question, Christine, but I will have a go. I think the recent work that was done by Kate Fitzgibbon and others at Monash University is a good example of what needs to be done, which was looking at this in a really nuanced way. I think at times this debate can play out something along the lines of ‘Men’s behaviour change programs do not work, men’s behaviour change programs do work’, and it is pretty simplistic. The reality is that men’s behaviour change programs have a role to play. And then the questions become: what are the nuances around who you are talking about, what is the specific nature of the program and how did they get referred? You see in Kate’s work, for example, that those who were court mandated were less likely to engage. The work they did to understand the perspective of victim-survivors was distinguishing between attendance, engagement and completion. Their output measures are really important; three different output measures need to be looked at when assessing the effectiveness of men’s behaviour change programs.

I think also the practice model really matters. I can follow up with this research, but there is recent research outside of Australia which looked at the difference between a Duluth-based men’s behaviour change program and an acceptance and commitment therapy based men’s behaviour change program, so not just clumping men’s behaviour change programs in as like one homogenous bunch. There are different approaches to the delivery of those programs, so I think more nuance in the discussion around what works and what does not and for whom is a really important part of what is needed.

Chris COUZENS: Great. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks.

Joshua LOURENSZ: Could I add really quickly to that, because I think it is a kicker. From a broader services frame, we have seen that social impact measures are really hard to do for particular programs, because you sit back and go, ‘What else is going on for the men in these behaviour change programs? What else is going on in their lives?’ Just to give context to that around family dispute resolutions, one of our members,

CatholicCare Victoria, runs three of the family relationship centres across the state, and out of the 6,000 people they have seen over the last two years, often couples and families that cannot work out between themselves how to divvy up property or looking after the kids or the like, a certain percentage—and these three are across I think Ballarat, Geelong and Shepparton—over 2,000 of these 6,000, had an income of between 20 grand and 60 grand. I think these are really core. And this is not to say that people in these situations need to have men's behaviour change programs, but I think it is a good example to go, 'What else? What are the pressures on people's lives, on living?' So this program, as Matt said, can be effective for X, Y and Z reasons, but also, how else do we gather a good understanding of this program in light of everything else that is going on?

Credit to the Victorian Government, particularly the early intervention investment framework: there are now significant public servant capabilities to understand social impact through the journey to social inclusion work, looking at homelessness outcomes across a range of things. So I feel like there is perhaps that kind of approach to evaluation. It is not an easy one, but that can tell a better story perhaps.

Chris COUZENS: Thank you.

Matt TYLER: I also think, and it is linked to the perpetration work, if there was a better understanding of perpetration, there might be a broader question, which is: what is needed in addition to men's behaviour change programs to engage with—and let us take the Man Box research—the 28% of men who have used violence against an intimate partner? And just by numbers that would be a significant commitment of funding if it was addressed through men's behaviour change programs alone, so I think there is a bigger question around how governments respond to the prevalence of this problem.

Chris COUZENS: Thanks.

The CHAIR: Thanks. Chris.

Chris CREWETHER: Thank you, Chair. And thank you for your evidence and submissions as well. How can data from services providing support for financial, employment, gambling, parenting/dads' issues and so forth be better linked and integrated with family violence related data to better understand people who use family violence?

Joshua LOURENSZ: It is a great question, and it is something that there was thinking about in the consultation with our members. I think there was an acknowledgement when we did our consultations to form up our submission that services have often been women-only services or men-only services; there is a bit of a divide. That culture has shifted in the services domain—that was the feeling from the people we talked to in building up our consultation, our membership. We are still at a point I think from a service delivery perspective that the data is pretty unlinked and the ways that people are case managed or supported are quite distinct. So how can we better link these up? There was not an immediate solution aside from if we want to understand the profiling or the perspectives of victim-survivors within this, we need better capabilities to dig up the information that does exist down to the case notes and safety plan level. It is not just sitting in an easily searchable database of every client that a service provider has, so you have to sort of dig that up and put it there. And then for the people working with dads issues or a few other things you said it would be a piece of work to link that up. I cannot comment on how that would take place—just give a bit of context as to how that might be difficult, I guess.

Matt TYLER: Chris, to give a concrete example of what Josh is talking about, we have recently, off our own bat, conducted a review of our own participant database. We deliver many non-specialist family violence programs—for example, housing for men after they leave prison or programs related to substance use and mental health, so non-specialist family violence programs—and we have just had a look at our participant case notes, exactly as Josh points to, to understand how many of our participants have been victims of family violence. That type of work at the moment is very manual. It involves an agency actually going back through our participant database to understand the co-occurrence of what you are talking to. I think there would be tremendous value in taking a more systematic approach to that work, but that would require—and I would commend the Vic government on this: I think it is the first time in Australia's history that through the DTF's Empowerment Fund there has actually been funding to build the data capability of social service agencies. We have put in a submission for that and are really excited by it, but that type of investment would be needed in order to equip agencies to identify the co-occurrence of the challenges you are pointing to and then report that

back to government. And I think there would be huge value in government then consolidating and then sharing that back with—I am going to say the sector, but sharing that back with different sectors.

Chris CREWETHER: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Heang.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Chair. Could you elaborate more on your own submissions that say administrative data is shaped by biases ingrained in recording methods, fields recorded and the people recording and that the required fields in the data collection system often lend to a demographic bias which can impact First Nations and CALD communities?

Joshua LOURENSZ: From the consultation with our members when we were building this it was just clear, and it is kind of what I pointed to before—the social services sector see people when there is lots of stuff going on often in their lives. There are inherent biases. The lessons that we can draw from information that services hold is not necessarily applicable to the whole of Victorian society, hence Matt's point that we need probably a prevalence study more broadly. But in terms of understanding people within the people that services see, there is a bias but I think a useful one. If we are able to understand the data that is on hand and if we better understand perpetration through the pictures—the bias is that we are not hearing from the perpetrator themselves. We are hearing from the victim-survivor who is seeking support. We are hearing that voice within the process. The whole orientation from a service perspective is: how do we keep them safe? How do we support this person to get on with their life?

It is very focused on the victim-survivor without thinking about the perpetrator, so the information that we have at hand—perhaps in safety planning, but even when I was speaking with the hospitals—we are not asking, 'How do we keep you safe at home? If you want to stay, it is up to you.' It is the decision of the person in the relationship. 'If you want to stay at home, how do we keep you safe? What are the triggers? What are the things that have led up to the use of violence in the past? Is there anything we can do?' So that is probably the extent of the understanding of perpetrators' behaviours and the way they use violence, but it is always to keep the victim-survivor safe, not to think, 'How do we change the systems or society to see the use of violence is not acceptable?' or 'How do we hold that person to account for their behaviour?' I would say those are the biases that are inherent within the kind of information that we have stored on the database. That is what has been said back to me.

Matt TYLER: I think, Heang, to build on what Josh has said, another really crucial bias is we know that victim-survivors under-report, and they under-report because they do not trust the justice system and a range of other systems that will ultimately be responsible for responding. We know that specific groups, including recently arrived Australians and culturally and linguistically diverse Australians, are more likely not to trust those systems and are therefore less likely to report. So when you are dependent upon administrative data, you are dependent upon the information that has already come to the attention of some of the systems Josh has touched on—hospital, justice et cetera—and there will be an inherent bias away from those who are less likely to report.

Joshua LOURENSZ: Particularly the example of the 70% of women who did disclose in that mental health setting, certainly the person who heads up that unit said, 'That is the people who have told us. It is always what you have told us.' Trusting relationships are so important for this systemically as well. We have a lot of information, but it is not going to tell the complete story.

Meng Heang TAK: All right, thank you. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Jackson.

Jackson TAYLOR: Thank you, Chair. Thank you very much, both of you, for your very detailed opening submission and for answering our questions today. I had a question around the men's behaviour change programs. A theme that has come up a bit during these hearings is around perhaps more effective use of feedback analysis of not just actual participation but how they engage with the program. What practical value do you see in greater use of that data being transmitted to, say, Victoria Police as an agency more efficiently and effectively?

Matt TYLER: Jackson, I think it is a really good question. I am going to stick to what I know and suggest that I think Phillip Ripper, the CEO of No to Violence, would be a really good person to go to. Jesuit Social Services works in the prevention and early intervention end, and we also work with serious and violent sex offenders but in a non-specialised way. We do not deliver men's behaviour change programs with the exception of a very small partnership with Tangentyere in the Northern Territory, so I reckon that question is probably better put to the CEO.

Jackson TAYLOR: I reckon it was either me or somebody else who probably asked that question.

Matt TYLER: That is great.

Chris COUZENS: I think you might have.

Matt TYLER: I will defer to No to Violence as the peak for men's behaviour change programs.

Joshua LOURENSZ: Yes, similarly, I am sorry, I can not answer either given that I actually do not know if any of our members deliver men's behaviour change programs. I could find out. But I have not had a good consultation on that, so I apologise.

Jackson TAYLOR: That is all right. I appreciate that. Another quick one. How can the Victorian Government address concerns from family dispute resolution services about the sharing of information as regulated by the *Family Law Act* and strong principles of client confidentiality?

Joshua LOURENSZ: Yes, this was core, I guess. Two of our members run family relationship centres. Speaking to a couple of practitioners along the way in developing this, it does seem it is a very rich area in terms of having detailed discussions with both parties. Certainly the information that members have provided to me shows that it could be a really useful point to understand, but privacy is incredibly protected under that federal legislation, so I think perhaps there is a broader piece of work from state and territory governments to have a conversation with the federal government on that legislation. There were differing views on this because people do need to feel safe to be able to talk about the issues in an honest and open way, but again the intent of having these conversations is to get the best outcomes for children and their families to prevent them from going through the court process, which often brings its own traumas and antagonisms. I think there would be a real weighing and maybe some deeper consideration—I could go back to my members and have a chat with some of the practitioners if you would like some further information, but it seemed like we know so much about these particular parties. Relationships Australia did a study. I am not exactly sure what they mean by 'relationship abuse', but they surveyed 1,700 client surveys from their intake and 68% experienced relationship abuse. It is a high percentage. CatholicCare Victoria said it is about 35 to 45% which have family violence, and that is family violence as distinct from the usual conflict that you would imagine when a relationship breaks down—it is moving into family violence territory. That is 35 to 45%, so it is a significant part. Whether we could understand penetration better as a result of a broader discussion, I think it is worth pursuing, but it would have to be carefully done.

Jackson TAYLOR: Thank you very much. Cheers.

Matt TYLER: Thanks, Jackson.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Thank you to Matt and Joshua for all the evidence that you have provided to us today. We are greatly appreciative of the time you have taken to prepare this and also for your submissions.

We will now take a lunch break and resume in about an hour's time. Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.