

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria

Melbourne—Monday 5 August 2024

MEMBERS

Ella George – Chair

Annabelle Cleeland – Deputy Chair

Chris Couzens

Chris Crewther

Cindy McLeish

Meng Heang Tak

Jackson Taylor

WITNESSES

Amanda Alford, Director of Government Relations, Policy and Evidence, and

Ebony King, Senior Policy Adviser, Our Watch.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The CHAIR: On linked data, do you think it is possible to link data collected in a national perpetrator study to data collected by Victorian services, such as courts and police?

Amanda ALFORD: That is probably for you. It is also probably one that we could take on notice and provide slightly more detail on. But did you want to start?

Ebony KING: Yes, it is tricky. I mean, if you get into the real techy side of things, you need the same counting rules. You need to have comparable data that is collected in the same types of ways. You might be able to compare and talk about them in the same ways and how they might reflect on one another, but they might not necessarily be linkable in that way, and I think the data architecture for the national plan is still really being built. It is a massive project, I would imagine, to link these, but that is not to say it cannot be done. So we will take that one on notice and get back to you.

Taken on notice response:

Linked data applies to administrative data from services and given the survey would be anonymous, it is unlikely survey and administrative data can be linked. However, we note that as a non-service delivery organisation, Our Watch is not in a position to confirm whether linking a perpetrator study to existing administrative data is possible and suggest the Committee raise this question with other witnesses who are in a better position to respond.

Annabelle CLEELAND: We have heard about some of the limitations of particularly men coming through the justice system, circling back through and repeat offending but not being able to identify why. Tell us from your perspective about those barriers between the judicial data and the state or service collection of data and the inability to share between them, as it seems from my perspective anyway.

Ebony KING: It is a really challenging one. I think across multiple areas of government there is a real challenge with sharing data. But I think in relation to the examples you mentioned I will have to take that one on notice. I am not too familiar with the information sharing between the justice system and other systems, but I can get back to you on that.

Taken on notice response:

We note that as an organisation focussed on the primary prevention of violence against women, we are not in a position comment on the barriers for juridical data and administrative data collected by services to be shared between them. We suggest that response services, and representatives from the juridical system, are better placed to answer this question.

Annabelle CLEELAND: You can take this on notice because it is definitely someone else's turn, but looking globally, is there any example where a survey or strategy has worked really effectively that we can model the effectiveness of?

Amanda ALFORD: There is a little bit of work internationally. For example—and we can take on notice and provide you more information about this—there is a multi-country study which provides some information of that. That is a UN multi-country study focused on the Asia-Pacific. Emma Fulu and others have been involved in developing that. So that would be one example. There are then some smaller scale studies across particularly North America largely focused in kind of university contexts in particular, so again we can provide information on that. I also note that people like Professor Michael Flood and others would be able to provide additional information on those. Is there anything you wanted to add?

Ebony KING: I think that captures most of it. I think there is interest in Canada in the New South Wales pilot perpetrator study, for example, so I think there is a lot of interest. But as we have found with Victoria and the work that was done with the royal commission, internationally Victoria is looked to as a leader in this space, particularly in terms of primary prevention. We have a lot of interest from international stakeholders as well about the work that we do, so I think that this is another example of the way that Australia can be leading.

Amanda ALFORD: It is an important reminder—we do get a lot of interest from other countries about Australia's approach to primary prevention. Obviously the Victorian context has been leading that both in terms of infrastructure as well as service delivery, investment and work across all parts of the continuum. It is something that we are continually asked. And Our Watch plays a role in terms of providing information to other countries, to UN and other type forums—so, for example, we co-presented to the recent World Health Summit. Those kinds of engagements, as Ebony has indicated, really underscore the importance of staying the course and taking that next step in relation to primary prevention, because there is now incredible longitudinal data and value and experience, particularly in Victoria, in terms of understanding what works, what might work better and providing information to other countries—but also acknowledging, though, we can learn an incredible amount from other countries and the approaches they can take. It is a two-way street.

Taken on notice response:

Male perpetration of family, domestic and sexual violence is under-researched in Australia and internationally. Research conducted overseas that have contributed to the evidence base on family, domestic and sexual violence perpetration include The United Nations Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific, and smaller scale studies in the United States (see references below). Similar perpetration studies have yet to take place in Australia.

The United Nations Multi-Country Study included a survey of more than 10,000 men and 3,000 women in nine sites, and across six countries (Bangladesh, China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Papua New Guinea). The study presented data for the prevalence of, and factors associated with male perpetration of intimate partner violence (IPV). Analysis included factors related to social characteristics, gender attitudes and relationship practices, victimisation history, psychological factors, substance misuse, and participation in violence outside the home.

The study demonstrated that perpetration of IPV by men is prevalent in the general population in the sites studied and that factors associated with perpetration varied by country and type of violence. Overall, the study found that factors related to gender and relationship practices to be most important, followed by experiences of childhood trauma, alcohol misuse and depression, low education, poverty, and involvement in gangs and fights with weapons.

The Multi-Country Study employed multinominal analysis which enabled analysis of whether physical and sexual partner violence perpetration are part of the same pattern of violence. The study found that not all perpetrators use all types of violence, though some individuals use both physical and sexual partner

violence. The study also identified patterns in risk factors for physical violence and sexual violence separately, as well as factors associated with the co-occurrence of both forms of violence perpetration.

A study that can identify patterns of perpetration and risk factors is relevant to primary prevention, early intervention and response efforts by providing data that inform approaches and strategies. For example, the Multi-Country study in the Asia-Pacific found that factors associated with perpetration of sexual IPV seem to be more similar to those associated with non-partner sexual violence than those associated with physical IPV, which suggests that men who use sexual violence might need specific interventions. Further, practices related to gender inequality, such as controlling behaviour by men and sexual practices that objectify women, were strongly associated with IPV perpetration. This suggests that along with addressing individual attitudes, primary prevention interventions should focus on men's identities, social norms and power relations that might be more causally related to perpetration of IPV. The research authors assert that interventions should be tailored to respond to the specific patterns of violence in various contexts, and that physical and sexual partner violence might need to be addressed in different ways.

It should be noted that the Multi-Country study has some limitations. Importantly, most samples were not nationally representative and thus typify only the sites included, and do not represent the whole Asia-Pacific region, and the generalisability of findings beyond the sample is unclear. This underscores the need for an Australian nationally representative survey that can provide reliable data about perpetration of violence, and its patterns, risk and protective factors so that are broadly generalisable to the whole population.

In north America, smaller scale studies have focussed on the perpetration of sexual violence and dating violence among university and school samples. A systematic review of findings regarding lifetime prevalence rates of sexual perpetration in college men in Canada and America included data from 78 independent samples including 25,524 college men, and found that on average, 29% of college males report engaging in behaviours defined as sexual perpetration. However, the measurement strategy used (meaning the questionnaire administered) was a strong influence on reported rates, so results were varied. Further, unlike the UN Multi-Country Study, the systematic review and the studies they were based on, did not include analysis of factors associated with perpetration. While prevalence rates are critical for monitoring change over time, analysis of the factors associated with perpetration are needed to guide prevention efforts. This again underscores the importance of population-level studies that provide data about perpetration prevalence, patterns and factors in an Australian context.

References:

Fulu, E., Jewkes, R., Roselli, T., and Garcia-Moreno, C. (2013). Prevalence of and factors associated with male perpetration of intimate partner violence: findings from the UN Multi-country Cross-sectional Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific. *The Lancet Global Health* 1(4): 187-207.

Anderson, R.E., Silver, K.E., Ciampaglia, A.M., Vitale, A.M., and Delahanty, D.L. (2022). The frequency of sexual perpetration in college men: A systematic review of reported prevalence rates from 2000 to 2017. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 22(3): 481-495.

The CHAIR: Great. Thanks, Annabelle. Chris.

Chris CREWETHER: Sorry, Chair, can I just add a quick supplementary to her question?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Chris CREWETHER: Just on your UN multi-country study, is there a particular country that stood out, or are there particular countries that stood out?

Amanda ALFORD: I think it was across six countries and about 30,000 people. I am not aware of the details of that. But we can take that on notice, and we certainly encourage engagement with Professor Flood, Emma Fulu and others who would have more detail on that.

Taken on notice response:

[See earlier response in relation to the Multi Country Study]. In addition:

The response to this question depends on what is meant by ‘standing out’, but the study did provide some interesting results in relation to patterns IPV perpetration in different countries, or in different areas within the same country. The study shows that IPV perpetration is fairly common in the Asia-Pacific region, although the prevalence varies widely by site.

IPV perpetration rates were lowest in Sri Lanka and the urban and rural sites in Indonesia, and highest in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea. The different patterns of partner violence perpetration that exist within the Asia-Pacific region could be partly accounted for by sociocultural differences, such as religious practices and social, cultural and gender norms, as well as other factors such as rates of childhood exposure to violence. A detailed analysis of these dynamics across countries is provided in the UN Multi-Country Study report.

The CHAIR: I would like to expand on something Jackson mentioned just around qual data, and you are welcome to take this notice if you like, but I am wondering if you can identify some of those opportunities for the Victorian government when it comes to better qual data collection and use.

Ebony KING: It might be a take on notice one.

Amanda ALFORD: We might have to take that on notice.

Ebony KING: But, yes, really around the methodology, because we know that people are much less likely to disclose violence use if it is a face-to-face qualitative interview, but there is a lot of progress being made and really sophisticated ways of doing this work. So there has been some ground made, and we can refer to those studies in our written response, but, yes, it is a real challenge. I am a qualitative researcher, and there is just a level of detail that you get from those that you just cannot get from the numbers. Yes, it is a really important piece, but quite challenging. But it is not to say that it cannot be done, so we will get back to you on that one.

Taken on notice response:

Michael Flood and colleagues have identified greater use of qualitative and mixed-method approaches as a key recommendation for research needed to understand violence perpetration in Australia (Flood et al., 2022). Quantitative research methods can capture data on the prevalence of violence perpetration, while qualitative data can provide insights about other aspects of violence domestic, family and sexual violence. As noted by Michael Flood and colleagues (2022), interview strategies can be utilised to assess and understand a perpetrator's perspective on their own use of intimate partner violence, including their feelings, emotions, thought processes and contexts associated with their behaviour before and after an incident. Understanding these factors is useful to inform treatment and prevention for perpetrators of violence.

Qualitative and mixed-method assessment approaches can also assess detail that is often missing from overall scale scores (i.e., quantitative data gathered through survey instruments), and increase the validity of survey instruments and quantitative data (Hamberger, Larsen and Campbell, 2016). For example, in a mixed-method assessment of violence in an undergraduate female sample, in-depth qualitative interviews found that a significant portion of violence perpetrated by women was actually 'horseplay', mock violence or self-defence (Lehrner and Allen, 2014). Qualitative interviews provided descriptions of the context and meaning of the participants' "violence" and were helpful in separating trivial violence from that intended by the construct of IPV (Lehrner and Allen, 2014). Including quantitative with qualitative methods can also enhance the validity of IPV measurement scales. Evans and colleagues (2016) documented problems with how respondents interpreted items on a quantitative survey, as well as underreporting of abuse experiences, which enabled improvements to these quantitative methods (Evans et al., 2016).

Qualitative methods must be carefully designed to avoid social desirability bias, where participants answer questions in ways that present answers that are more socially acceptable than their true opinions or behaviours, and thus create a socially appropriate image of themselves or certain situations (Junior Bishop, 2022). Research design includes the qualitative techniques used to obtain data (e.g. interviews), participant selection, and the wording, framing and order of questions used during data collection (Junior Bishop, 2022; Flood et al., 2022). Controlling the study context is also important, such as reducing potential for the presence of one or more people in addition the researcher and participant and ensuring participants understand and trust that their anonymity will be preserved, and personal information will be kept confidential. The interviewers' characteristics (e.g. social class, ethnicity, gender), attitude and way of conducting the interview are also strong determinations of social desirability bias. As noted by Flood and colleagues (2022), if a researcher is able to form a connection with a participant in a face-to-face setting, there may be increased willingness to disclose sensitive information.

There is opportunity for the Victorian Government to conduct mixed method research approaches that draw on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods and data. Together, these approaches

can increase the validity and reliability of data, and provide a more comprehensive understanding of domestic, family and sexual violence perpetration.

References:

Flood, M., Brown, C., Dembele, L., and Mills, K. (2022). *Who uses domestic, family, and sexual violence, how, and why? The State of Knowledge Report on Violence Perpetration*. Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology.

Hamberger, L.K., S. Larsen, and J. Campbell. (2016). Methodological Contributions to the Gender Symmetry Debate and its Resolution. *Journal of Family Violence* 31(8): p. 989-993.

Junior Bishop, J.P. (2022). Social Desirability Bias in qualitative health research. *Revista de Saúde Pública*. 56(101).

Paulhus, D.L. (1984). Two-component models of socially desirable responding. *Journal of Personal Social Psychology* 46(3): 598-609.