

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria

Melbourne—Monday 19 August 2024

MEMBERS

Ella George – Chair

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WITNESS

Professor Kate Fitz-Gibbon, Chair, Respect Victoria.

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. 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; Christine Couzens, the Member for Geelong; and Annabelle Cleeland, the Member for Euroa and Deputy Chair. Chris Crewther, the Member for Mornington, will be joining us midway through via Zoom.

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 Kate Fitz-Gibbon, Chair of Respect Victoria. Kate, I invite you to make a brief opening statement of 5 to 10 minutes, and this will be followed by questions from members. Thank you.

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: Wonderful. Thank you so much for the opportunity to give evidence today. I am Professor Kate Fitz-Gibbon, and I have the huge honour to be the Chair of Respect Victoria. I would like to repeat the Chair's acknowledgement of country and pay my respects to the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, to their elders past and present. I would also really like to acknowledge the incredible leadership of First Nations communities in the prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence. At Respect Victoria we have been incredibly fortunate to listen to and learn from our First Nations colleagues and are very grateful for their patience in allowing us to do so.

On behalf of the wonderful team at Respect Victoria, I want to thank the Committee for the opportunity today. I speak to you today with the support and the hard work of the incredible staff at Respect Victoria, and I am very grateful for that. Victoria has such a strong history—a nation-leading history—in family violence reform, so it is no surprise that we have an inquiry of this scope. We have led in prevention, early intervention and response and, to a more emerging degree, in recovery and healing. An important element of this reform agenda has been bringing the very people who use violence into view, to acknowledge the gendered nature of family violence as the target of prevention efforts and to ensure that we have better accountability throughout our family violence response and all systems that respond to domestic, family and sexual violence. These themes were highlighted so clearly in the work of the 2016 royal commission, and in the years since we have seen it repetitively communicated by survivor advocates, researchers and practitioners across prevention and response. As Victoria's dedicated agency for the primary prevention of violence against women and family violence, our submission to the inquiry focused on the role that perpetration data would play in preventing violence. Consistent and comprehensive data on perpetration is absolutely critical to helping us to understand what domestic, family and sexual violence looks like, what drives it, who it impacts and in what ways and, most importantly, how we can effectively stop it from happening in the first place.

Victoria has definitely reformed and improved its data collection, information sharing, risk assessment and management practices since the royal commission. However, we do know from response agencies that this data continues to be incomplete. A significant proportion of domestic, family and sexual violence is not reported to the police or to other services and so it is not represented in our official data sets. There are also challenges around data collection—the consistency of it as well as the analysis of it—which means that the data that we currently have in Victoria and across Australia does not give us a comprehensive picture of the perpetration of the very violence that we are seeking to eliminate. A repeated, comprehensive, national population-based survey would give us the best opportunity to understand the true prevalence of violence perpetration in

Australia, the patterns and the co-occurrence of different types of this violence and the pathways in and out of violence. A nationally representative survey should also seek to emphasise an understanding of perpetration as a behaviour rather than a focus on profiling the identity of perpetrators themselves.

While a call to understand more about people who use violence is absolutely understandable, particularly given the horror of 2024 that we have had in this space, we need to understand the behaviours. The prevalence is so great that we need to acknowledge that there is no one type of person that we are seeking to understand here who uses violence. Perpetrators come from every corner of our community. They are the people that we know, in many cases that we love and that we work with. People who use violence are everywhere. They are part of families, friendship groups, workplaces, sporting clubs, and they can even be in our Parliament. Any approach to constructing data on perpetration needs to allow for this nuance. There will not be a single identity or profile to be found.

We know that domestic, family and sexual violence is pervasive and that it impacts people from all of our community. A population survey could also be used to expand existing national research that shows the link between gendered drivers, reinforcing factors and the use of violence predominantly but not exclusively by men towards women and children. This is not to say that we do not already have some data. There are pockets of brilliant insights that can be built upon and utilised. We are not starting from a blank page.

It is somewhat indulgent, but let me tell you a little bit about the recent research that was undertaken by Jesuit Social Services—and that I know that you have heard about from Matt Tyler already—in partnership with Respect Victoria. The Man Box project demonstrated that there are clear and consistent links between attitudes that conform to dominant masculine stereotypes and the likelihood of men under 45 years old using and excusing violence. This research showed us that while a significant minority of young men agree with the stereotypes, most do not but they feel pressure to conform, and that is a problem. This research shows us not only the prevalence of risk factors but where our opportunities are to intervene. Reflecting on those insights, we believe a fuller understanding of how the gendered drivers, including gender stereotypes, relate to violent behaviour would result in more effective and more targeted prevention and early intervention efforts. The combination of data related to attitudes towards an understanding of gendered drivers and family violence dynamics as well as additional data about violence use would also help us to draw a line of sight from prevention areas and efforts through to violent behaviour. We do note that reinforcing factors, such as alcohol and other drugs, gambling, financial stress, mental illness and pornography use, are important for understanding the context in which violence occurs. These reinforcing factors interact with the gendered drivers to influence the frequency, the severity and sometimes the onset of violence, but they are not the primary cause.

We can also look to research that was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic to better understand perpetration. This research showed us that while both women and men experienced financial stress during the pandemic and overall rates of violence increased, the gendered nature of violence remained. Men were more likely to use violence and women were more likely to experience it. Income and financial security are inherently linked to gendered norms of exerting financial control; in other words, economic stress may result in violence in the context of the gendered drivers.

To finish up, a regular nationally representative, population-based survey of the perpetration of gender-based violence offers a number of benefits to primary prevention and early intervention. These benefits include a deeper understanding of who it is that uses domestic, family and sexual violence, how and in what context; the opportunity to analyse the links between gendered drivers, reinforcing factors and perpetration; and identification of leverage points for population-wide and cohort-specific primary prevention and early intervention efforts. It would enhance our capability to evaluate progress in addressing the gendered drivers and the reinforcing factors, and it would provide us with additional detail about the patterns of violence that are used, including the entries into and exits from perpetration and how that can be used to inform and deliver an effective service response system.

At Respect Victoria we believe that Victoria has an incredible opportunity to continue its leading and comprehensive approach to ending family violence and violence against women by advocating for a nationally consistent approach to collecting and analysing perpetration data. This will undoubtedly benefit the whole domestic, family and sexual violence system, including prevention, early intervention, response and recovery. Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Kate, for that excellent opening statement. I would like to start with a question regarding a national representative survey. This is something that we have heard about from plenty of other witnesses throughout the inquiry as well. My question is: can you explain why Respect Victoria would support a national survey as opposed to a state survey?

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: It is a fantastic question. I think it is not necessarily that we would not be supportive of a state-based survey, but if the opportunity is there to have a national survey, we believe that would be a more effective approach. We know that in Australia violence against women and family violence is a national crisis. No one state or territory is going to solve this problem alone. Wherever our approaches can be lined up consistently and comprehensively at the national level, there will be more to be gained. We do think in the first instance there would be a preference for a national survey. It also means a sharing of the significant resources that need to go towards it. It will mean that we can collect a greater dataset, which can have some quite significant implications. Particularly when you are looking at insights from some of the different areas and community groups, there may be an opportunity to collect greater data on the national level. We also know that many of the service responses, prevention efforts and early intervention are shared across states and territories, so it allows us to move forward nationally. That said, if a national survey is not possible, we do see that there are significant benefits in Victoria continuing its leadership in this space.

The CHAIR: I have got two follow-up questions relating to this. If there was a national survey, could it sufficiently provide disaggregated data for each individual state, including Victoria?

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: This is definitely a challenge, based on previous national surveys that we have seen, which do not always allow you to go into local government area data, for example. One of the strategies that Respect Victoria has been using is to boost the sample. That is something that the Victorian Government could certainly look to do—to lead. Certainly we have a huge amount of thought leadership in this space, and if there is a national survey, we should absolutely be ensuring that Victoria has a really key presence in designing, developing and implementing that survey and the approach to it. Also, what we could do is boost the sample—provide additional investment, which Victoria has been doing since the royal commission—to ensure that not only do we get the national picture but we also get a more detailed picture for Victoria. Respect Victoria has been really pleased to do that for the NCAS survey, so we could certainly look to move forward with a similar approach.

The CHAIR: If there was a Victorian-based survey only, not a national survey, who in Victoria would be best placed to lead this type of survey?

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: I think there are a range of organisations that should absolutely be at the table in terms of developing and implementing a survey. What I would stress around the survey, not necessarily around who leads it, is that we need to have diversity of expertise and experience. We need to ensure that we bring expertise from all across the community—our First Nations communities, multicultural communities and LGBTIQ+ communities—to ensure the design of a survey tool that is going to allow us to see family, domestic and sexual violence in all their forms. One of the other things is that over the last 10 years we have seen in many of the efforts around domestic, family and sexual violence that sexual violence often drops off the agenda. We know that sexual violence can occur within and outside the context of family violence, but we need to ensure that any efforts at a national or state level around a survey do not forget sexual violence and that we have that expertise at the table as well in the development of the survey.

The CHAIR: We have spoken a lot about a national survey with different witnesses, and I think it is really clear to the Committee the role of a national survey in understanding that full picture of the perpetration of family violence, particularly when it comes to unreported family violence. In your opening statement you spoke about how a survey could help support the prevention of family violence. Could you dive a bit deeper into that for us, please?

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: Absolutely. One of the key benefits of a survey would be a greater understanding of the diversity and the nuances of those who use family violence, the onset of that violence as well as the context in which it is used. We know that domestic, family and sexual violence are gendered, and we have that understanding of the gendered drivers that underpin it. But connecting that up with a detailed understanding of violence perpetration is absolutely critical so that we can ensure that the range of work that Respect Victoria

and other organisations do in this space is evidence based and reflective of the ways in which perpetrators are using violence.

One of the things that we have recommended in our submission is a repeated survey. That is because we know that perpetration changes, and we need to ensure that our understandings of prevention and early intervention, response and recovery are shifting to reflect the changes in perpetration behaviour. We cannot be using the same strategies from what we knew in 2016, around the time of the royal commission, to be preventing behaviour now. For example, when we are developing our campaigns at Respect Victoria we are constantly checking, testing and co-designing them with experts in the field to ensure that they meet the needs now. Without a comprehensive understanding of perpetrator data, in many instances we are not able to ensure that all points of the system are reflecting the understanding of behaviours, and prevention is an example of that.

The CHAIR: I have got a lot more questions. I might just ask one more, if I may. In the absence of a national survey or a state survey, what else can the Victorian Government do to better collect data on people using family violence, specifically around that prevention of family violence space where it is beneficial towards prevention?

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: Definitely. We at the moment have, across Victoria, a number of datasets that are not linked up, that do not speak to each other and that are not necessarily consistently coordinated or using the same data points, definitions or collection. Looking across at all the data that is collected across the domestic, family and sexual violence sector in Victoria, from prevention through to recovery, would have significant benefits. When we look, for example, just at the data in the perpetrator-intervention space specifically, we know that many of the men's services organisations collect their own data and have their own datasets, but they are quite different, disparate or unjoined from what is either at the government level or what is being collected by their sector colleagues, so coordination and consistency of existing datasets would be of significant value for everyone, in terms of understanding what people who use violence and who step into the service system look like. Of course when we are dealing with a problem that is significantly under-reported we should never only rely on the data within the system, because we know that we will not capture those perpetrators that never come to the attention of the service system. The recent research by the Australian death review network and ANROWS shows very clearly just over 40% of perpetrators that were not within sight of the domestic and family violence system at the time that they committed a domestic homicide.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Annabelle.

Annabelle CLEELAND: You have just answered a few of my questions, which I am aggressively trying to write down the answer to. Excellent. Amazing. Just tapping in on your comments around sexual violence, we heard earlier about the missed opportunity of sexual violence not being included in the Orange Door referral system. Do you think that that was also a missed opportunity?

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: I think being in prevention, we are kind of less engaged in the operation of things like the Orange Doors. I think it is always useful for us to be considering what is and is not included and what is the most effective way for our response system to operate, so it is certainly useful to bring those conversations together. I know that you have heard from sexual assault services. It is really important that we step back and we think about victim-survivors, who may be experiencing a number of co-occurring forms of violence, and ensure that our service system meets their needs, that it is accessible, that it is inclusive and that it reflects the diversity of their own experiences. Looking at the composition of the Orange Doors is a good checkpoint, when we are now eight years out from the royal commission, to ensure it is meeting the needs of its clients.

Annabelle CLEELAND: With the comments around standardising data and making it more consistent, alongside a survey, preferably national but potentially state, where will the sexual violence data come from? Are there sufficient touchpoints already with prevention service providers as well as victim-survivor and perpetrator support to make sure that we are having well-rounded holistic data inputs into a potential statewide system?

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: Certainly. In terms of that crisis response, Victoria has such a phenomenal history of the centres against sexual assault, the CASAs, and the data that is collected there. Again, there is probably support that could be provided to ensure it is coordinated and consistent. We also have in Victoria the multidisciplinary centres, the MDCs, which were referred to as models of best practice in the Royal

Commission into Family Violence, and an opportunity there to look at multiple service touchpoints that are offered within those centres and to be asking about trajectories of service contact. Again, these are predominantly victim-survivor-focused offerings, so what we need to be asking is: where are our people who use violence in all its forms, including sexual violence, appearing in our system?' And even more importantly: where are they not appearing? Where are they falling out of sight? We have the perpetrator components of the MARAM. Is that allowing us greater data collection? What are we already learning from that? I think it is about acknowledging where we have insights. We are not starting from zero, without doubt. But we definitely do not have a state piece and we certainly do not have a national piece, and the scope of this inquiry is such an exciting opportunity to have a vision for what that would look like and to really push it forward.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Your comments about how data in Victoria currently does not give us a comprehensive picture of a perpetrator's profile—what is it providing? What are we getting from the data that we are currently collecting in Victoria?

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: It is really looking across a range of different aspects. We know from the data that Respect Victoria and Jesuit Social Services have led through Man Box—a little plug for our forthcoming event, when we are releasing the second part of that—which Respect Victoria has launched about looking specifically at what it tells us about prevention insights. That is on 30 August at the Wheeler Centre. We have that data around some of the harmful attitudes and stereotypes that underpin young men's use of violence—a really important component, particularly in the prevention and the early intervention space. Of course when we look at the complete other end, we have police data, and that in particular will show us reported abuse, which we know is going to be a small capture, particularly in the sexual violence space but in all forms of domestic, family and sexual violence. But we do know from police data that we can particularly get a very good picture of high-harm serial offenders. That is a small cohort but not an insignificant one, particularly in terms of perpetration and impact. We then have an entire service system and one that is not fully connected but far more coordinated and connected in Victoria than any other state and territory thanks to the reform agenda of the royal commission. As I say, it is individual but it is there that each of those organisations' response services would have insights and data insights that they could pull out around people who use violence. Again, this is just giving us the tip of the iceberg in terms of understanding which perpetrators come into contact with the system, and then it is what is sitting underneath that we need to think really creatively about. And something like a population-based survey gives us the opportunity to draw attention to the full scope of perpetration, not just that which we are already seeing in contact with the service system.

Annabelle CLEELAND: I have got lots of questions, but I might ask just one more to share the love. That comment that 40% of perpetrators were not within sight at the time of their offence is something that we all have to grapple with, which is really, really hard, and in your recommendations you talk about identifying intervention points. How do we delve deeper into that iceberg? How do we increase the visibility of perpetrators?

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: I can provide some initial thoughts, but then I would love to give a response on notice, because I know that me and the team could give you some really concrete information around that. I think we are getting more and more understanding from the work of the death review teams both within and outside of Victoria as well as the Australian death review network around where some of those intervention points are. That 40% statistic was specifically in relation to homicide, which is why I have gone to that death review teamwork.

What we certainly see there is in particular a lot of the recent work on interventions has flagged the importance of interventions in informal networks, that quite often we know that people who use violence that were not known to the service system were absolutely known to family, friends, potentially neighbours and co-workers. So what we see there is the importance of ensuring that we have an awareness and an understanding amongst all members of the community about what to do if they see problematic behaviours. That is what some of the Respect Victoria campaigns have really been focused on: giving people a language and an authorising environment in which to know what to do if they see behaviours that are not acceptable. It is those really small, gentle nudges. It is also the call-ins for people to act in different ways and to know how to support that amongst their family and friends. But certainly one of the key intervention points we are seeing consistently come up are those informal support networks beyond the entire response and early intervention system that we know is there.

Annabelle CLEELAND: I will pause, but with your Man Box plug on 30 August, if you could –

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: We could share the details.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Thank you. Can you please –

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: Taken on notice.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks. Christine.

Chris COUZENS: Thank you so much for coming today. We really appreciate your time. I have got sort of a jumble of questions that I will try to make sense of. Firstly, can you explain what data gaps have been identified by the prevention of family violence data platform, and what are the opportunities for future investment in data collection? You have touched on this a bit around sexual violence, and then there is mental health and youth and queer folk and all those areas, but also the misidentification through, generally, the police. The Aboriginal community are pretty clear that that is a big issue for them. I know that is a lot in one hit.

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: Many components—thank you so much. To start perhaps with the question of misidentification, we have just had a significant increase in our understanding and awareness of misidentification of who the primary aggressor is since the royal commission, and we absolutely have to be aware of that in how we interpret and report on perpetrator data, particularly when looking at Victoria Police, because of the harm that that may do for communities—in particular, First Nations communities but also multicultural communities and LGBTIQ communities. That question is part of why in our submission we have really stressed the importance of having those groups at the table in any approach that is taken forward for a national or a state-based survey. We need to understand from those communities that are working with the victim-survivors who have been misidentified where the opportunities are to ensure the most accurate and reflective data collection. But also, once we have got that data, let us absolutely use that to train frontline responders to know how to identify accurately, because that is part of what we really need to be pushing forward as well. So that is going to be incredibly helpful.

In terms of the family violence data platform, that is a piece of work that Respect Victoria has led over a number of years with our colleagues at the Victorian Crime Statistics Agency. I have not had an update on the latest update of data in the last six months to a year, so I will take that on notice, and we will come back with a more detailed response to that for you.

Chris COUZENS: And the Aboriginal data sovereignty, have you had any focus on that at all?

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: It is a really important piece. We have worked closely with a number of First Nations organisations, in particular Djirra, to understand what the role is for Respect Victoria in this space—where it is for us to be amplifying their efforts to work to support with some of the resources that our agency has in the prevention space, and where it is to step back and let them lead. I am sure their submission will say that they have a number of thoughts around how this can be done, and we would certainly be supportive of that.

Chris COUZENS: Great. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Great. Jackson.

Jackson TAYLOR: Thank you, Chair. And thank you very much for that very impressive opening statement and for taking your time to answer our questions. Just on the question regarding misidentification, you spoke briefly about training for Victorian police officers. Do we know what currently exists? And what further could you suggest in terms of really highlighting this issue, because it is often Victorian Police on the coalface that are having to deal with making these decisions? I am just trying to understand: what currently exists and what are the practical steps, in your view, they could take to increase training or awareness on this issue?

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: It is a fantastic question. Certainly with the introduction of the centre of excellence for family violence learning at Victoria Police—since the release of the royal commission, I think under assistant commissioner Lauren Callaway's lead—there has been significantly more work done around

misidentification and trying to reduce it. I do know that Victoria Police have introduced a screening tool since the royal commission that they are using to more accurately identify the person in need of protection and also training to try and combat misidentification. I do not know the degree to which they have been successful or to which they have shifted current practices, and I think that is a really important thing for us to understand.

Jackson TAYLOR: Thank you. In relation to the questions regarding the national or state-based survey, there was a point of discussion in some previous hearings. How often do you think that should be done? I think you said 'regular', but how regular? There was discussion around 'not too regular to get trends' and 'too often could have these outcomes'.

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: In looking across a number of the population level surveys that are being done, particularly the personal safety survey and the national community attitude survey, we have recommended four years. We believe that is the time needed not only to collect the data but to analyse it, to report on it and to reflect any emerging and needed trends to shift the data instrument tool for future years. We know that perpetration behaviours shift over time. Perpetrators are incredibly adept at using all avenues at their means to perpetrate their abuse, so there is often a need to slightly tinker with and change aspects of the instrument. We believe four years gives the time to do that. But we would also defer to colleagues at the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Crime Statistics Agency, ANROWS, the Australian Institute of Criminology and others who have significant expertise in the space.

Jackson TAYLOR: Part of your submission talks about a sample size large enough. Do you have any ideas in terms of figures, at a national and at a state level, for what a large enough sample would look like?

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: Being the qualitative researcher at the table, I am going to absolutely take that question on notice and have wonderful quantitative experts in our team tell you that number, because I am sure we can come back with something on that.

Jackson TAYLOR: Wonderful. That is all from me for now. Thank you very much.

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: Thank you so much.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We have been joined by Chris Crewther, the Member for Mornington. Welcome, Chris.

Chris CREWETHER: Welcome again. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Chris, I will hand over to you for some questions.

Chris CREWETHER: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Kate, for your submission and your opening statement and your time today. I noted in your opening statement where you said that the data is often incomplete and we often do not have the full extent of family violence and sexual violence levels reported and you noted that there are challenges in data collection, particularly when it comes to consistency and analysis. Given that, can you explain what would be required to conduct detailed modelling to explore the links between the gendered drivers of violence and reinforcing factors such as alcohol or pornography and violent behaviours, particularly given those limitations?

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: Absolutely. Thank you so much for that question. One of the key strengths of a population-based survey is that it allows us to go beyond the service data that is currently collected and which we all recognise and know is limited. That is not a criticism of anyone working on collecting that data; it is by virtue of the systems that record it, the time that frontline staff have to record that data and then the inconsistency across the system as well. A population-based survey allows us to design a survey-based instrument that looks across the full spectrum of prevention, early intervention, response and recovery to what we need to understand about perpetrators and perpetration to inform effective and evidence-based responses to people who use violence at each of those points.

For us, in terms of Respect Victoria and our focus on primary prevention, it allows us to be asking the questions about the gendered drivers, the contexts within which perpetrators use violence, things like the age of onset and the impact of some of the reinforcing factors that you have mentioned and to understand how that then maps against a perpetrator's full spectrum of violence as well as the different forms of violence that they use.

Chris CREWITHER: Thank you. How would this type of work contribute to building a better understanding of people who use family violence?

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: I am a firm believer that we absolutely cannot prevent and respond to what we do not understand, and at the moment we do not understand perpetration in its full spectrum. We understand some perpetrators, but we should be absolutely concerned about the ones that are invisible to us. In developing a comprehensive whole-of-system response to domestic, family and sexual violence—in no other area would you seek to do that and not know the behaviour that is at the core that you are trying to eliminate. So this is a huge opportunity for us to have a spotlight on the behaviour.

Chris CREWITHER: Thank you very much, Kate. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Chris. Kate, I just want to go back to something you mentioned in your opening statement around sexual violence and how that is often overlooked as being a really significant component of family violence. That is also something that we have heard from other witnesses. Do you have any recommendations around how we could better collect data around sexual violence and ensure that it is elevated to the position it should be in when it comes to family violence and understanding the full range of violence committed against women?

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: It is a really important question. I think it is certainly not a falling off that is unique to Victoria. We saw in the development of the most recent *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children*, during the stakeholder and the victim-survivor advocate consultations that informed that plan, consistent acknowledgement that sexual violence had fallen off the national agenda for the 10 years prior as well and particularly that nuanced understanding that sexual violence occurs both within and outside of the context of domestic and family violence. In a state that had, incredibly luckily, a Royal Commission into Family Violence, I think sometimes that isolation of different forms of gender-based violence has been acutely felt.

I think it is really important for us to understand the mapping of data that already exists. We do not need to work from a blank page, so we should not. So where do we have, across the service system, existing data on sexual violence perpetration? What does that tell us? And then to understand what data we need and how we ensure that, at all points of a state-based or national survey, we allow for the full breadth of perpetrator behaviour to come to the surface, because we know that perpetrators rarely use one form of abusive behaviour; they usually have a toolbox that they are referring to—so for us to understand the interconnection between those, how they may change and shift over time and what that tells us about response.

The CHAIR: When you speak about the interconnection between the different types of violence, do you have any recommendations about how we can better collect data that demonstrates how different types of violence are connected?

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: It is really important that we have the different points of the system speaking to each other. We need our domestic and family violence services, early intervention, response—their data collection—to be speaking to sexual assault services, response and early intervention. But also our general services—how can we connect up data from health services, from police, from the many different places in which victim-survivors seek support? But again, we know that those existing points of the system will tell us far more about victimisation than they will about perpetration. Again there is that challenge that so often perpetrators are not acutely in the view of the system in the way that victim-survivors are, hence this inquiry.

The CHAIR: With that in mind, should we be asking more questions when data is collected about family violence about the people who are using violence?

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: Absolutely. I think it is really valuable to understand, from a person experiencing violence, their understanding. Of course we need to balance that up with providing help and support, and as much as we would love to, every time a victim-survivor is engaging with the system, understand the perpetrator behind them so that we can acutely provide an effective response to that, we are also providing a crisis response potentially in that moment. But victim-survivors better understand the risk that they face than anyone else. They will understand and be able to describe in detail the abuse that they have experienced. But we certainly should not put understanding perpetration on their shoulders.

The CHAIR: One of the recommendations that Respect Victoria has made to the Victorian Government is that the Victorian Government advocate for an intersectional analysis of the personal safety survey data to better understand how violence impacts people differently based on their identities and characteristics. How should the Victorian Government best advocate for this? For example, who should the Victorian Government advocate to and in what kind of forum?

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: I think the importance here—and I mentioned this in the opening statement—is that there is no one perpetrator and there is no one type of perpetrator behaviour. We know that some types of perpetration are experienced similarly by different communities and there are some forms of abusive behaviours that are quite unique to different communities across Victoria, and we need to ensure that all of that is in view in any way that we move forward in understanding perpetration and people who use violence. The communities that are working in those areas that have the specific expertise are absolutely going to be best placed to ensure that the development of any perpetrator strategy or perpetrator survey tool best reflects the full gamut, and I think we can do that. We should be ambitious. Victoria has been so ambitious in this space, so we should continue that forward. This is not about picking off one piece of the perpetration challenge, it is about looking across and developing an evidence base on all forms of domestic, family and sexual violence.

Respect Victoria has a mission to make Victoria free from violence, and we are never going to achieve that unless all Victorians are free from violence. So we would certainly be really keen to be working with the Victorian Government to ensure an inclusive and truly intersectional approach to the perpetration data question.

The CHAIR: In Victoria we certainly have a very ambitious family violence research agenda, and dare I say it is probably nation-leading. Do you have any recommendations about how we can better support ongoing research, monitoring and evaluation activities, at that state-based level, that focus on the perpetration of violence and the drivers of that violence?

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: Absolutely, and I think the Victorian Government has invested more in family violence research than any other state or territory, so we should absolutely be proud of that. I know that under the Family Safety Victoria—now DFFH—research agenda there have been a suite of projects funded, and in particular in the most recent round, a suite of perpetrator-focused projects. Some of those have come to fruition and some are still underway.

It is really important for us to know what has been done and to learn from that and also to ensure that we have a good understanding of what is in train. I think there is nothing more frustrating than replication and duplication of effort because people did not know that we were already in. But also where the challenges have been—wearing my Monash University hat, having led one of the projects under the Victorian Government family violence research agenda—shows you where the data gaps are and where the challenges are in terms of understanding perpetrators and perpetrators' behaviours. So bringing together people who have been involved in looking at that data and trying to use it so far, I am sure will also give you a really good understanding of where some of those gaps are.

The CHAIR: And with your academic hat on again, do you have any recommendations to the Victorian Government about the family violence research agenda and what more can be done in this space?

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: I think we want to constantly be learning. We look back to 2016, and the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence gave us such an incredible capture of the challenge in 2016, before we led a world-leading reform agenda and had the significant interrupter and challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. We would be naive to think that we are still encountering and facing the same challenge now, so we need to adapt. We need to ensure that that is data driven—what we move forward with now—and I think there is significantly more that we could be ensuring is done to reflect that. We are so fortunate in Victoria to have a dedicated prevention agency that can ensure that we keep prevention on the table. Really making sure that we have the best data at our fingertips to understand perpetrators and perpetration behaviour is so critical to the work of Respect Victoria as well as all the agencies working across early intervention, response and recovery.

I think the fact that we are still asking these questions eight years on from the royal commission is really important and is really positive. This was never going to be solved by one round of reforms, unfortunately. Significant progress has been made because of that in Victoria. There is certainly hope that we have a more connected and more accessible system, so there is hope that you are getting more people in the door, but now

there is a question of asking who are the people that are using violence in the state and what is the most comprehensive response to perpetrators. I think that is a step forward from the royal commission and a really important place to be.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Before we conclude, is there anything that we have not covered today that you think the Committee should be made aware of or that you would like to get on the record here?

Kate FITZ-GIBBON: I just take the opportunity to thank the Committee. I know I have taken a few questions on notice, and we will absolutely come back to you with details on those. As I say, Respect Victoria has the tremendous privilege of being a dedicated state agency for the prevention of violence against women and all forms of family violence. We know that we absolutely cannot do that without understanding perpetration at its core, so we really look forward to and would be keen to be involved in any way we can in the work that comes into informing this inquiry but also comes out of it, and we are really looking forward to working with the Victorian Government on that.

The CHAIR: Once again, thank you, Professor Kate Fitz-Gibbon, for appearing before the Committee today and for your very valuable evidence.

The Committee will now take a short break before our next witness.

Witness withdrew.