



**Jesuit  
Social Services**  
Building a Just Society

**the  
men's  
project**

A Jesuit Social Services initiative

# An agenda for engaging men and boys to end men's violence against women

Submission to the Domestic, Family and Sexual  
Violence Commission

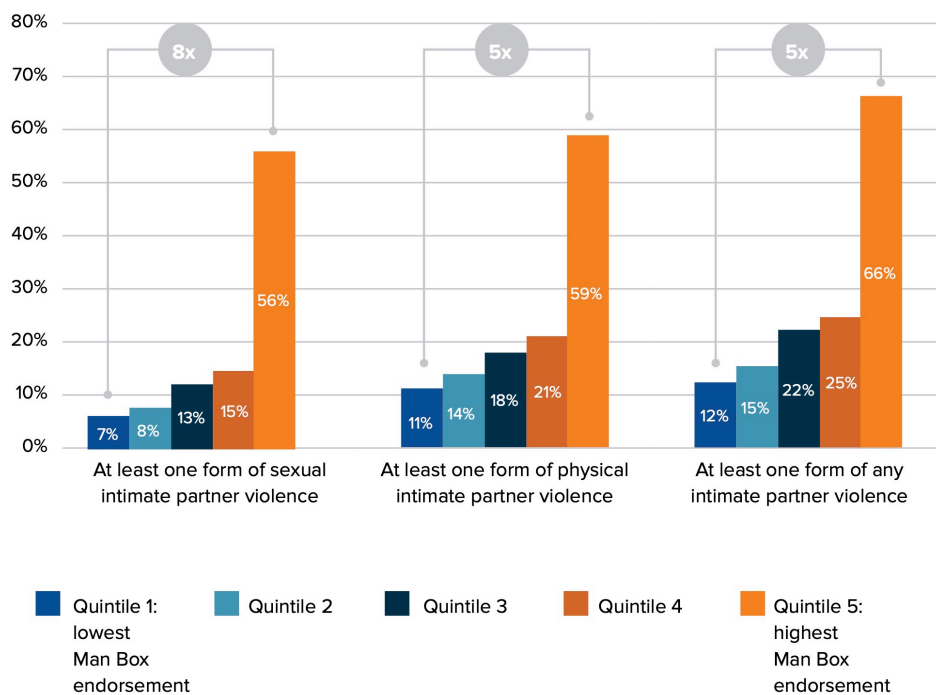
November 2024

# 1. What are the priorities for understanding the drivers of men and boys' perpetration of violence?

Jesuit Social Services' [Man Box](#) research found men who most strongly agreed with rigid and outdated ideas of what it meant to be a 'real man' were more likely to have perpetrated violence, hold violence-supportive attitudes and have consumed violent pornography. Overall, we found that 28 per cent of 18-30 year-old men had used at least one form of physical or sexual violence against a current or former partner.

**Figure 1:** Proportion of men who reported perpetrating intimate partner violence (aggregated), by type of violence and Man Box quintile, 18-30 y.o. men

Aggregated by type of intimate partner violence



**Recommendation:** Jesuit Social Services recommends investment in the collection of more and better data on the extent of perpetration as well as its dynamics and drivers. This requires further research into factors that increase the risk and severity of perpetration; factors which protect against it; and pathways and supports that address it. This should include primary research and support for organisations to better glean insights from the lived experience of their participants (e.g. in the case of Jesuit Social Services, our youth and adult justice participants). This should also include a focus on developing an understanding of the experiences of different population groups, places and settings. The data should be used to inform prevention and early intervention efforts and investment.

**A focus on adolescents:** The Adolescent Man Box (AMBOX) is a piece of research work that we have been progressing, with limited funding, over a number of years. The objectives of the research are as follows:

- To build evidence and understand what young people (of all genders) think about the pressures and expectations around masculinity and what it means to a man.
- To give educators, parents and the broader prevention sector insights into the attitudes and behaviours around gender, relationships and risk-taking behaviours, mental health and attitudes towards intimate partner violence.
- To contribute insights to the delivery of respectful relationships and consent education and give schools a starting point for conversations around dominant forms of masculinity and the link to violence supportive attitudes.

## 2. What are the key intervention points for engaging with men and boys?

It is necessary to work at many levels simultaneously to meet the needs of young people and men in their environments and to target specific types of abuse. Priority levers for change include:

- working across a range of settings with those who can positively influence men and boys (influence the influencer) – e.g. teachers, sports coaches, social workers
- working with adolescent boys (particularly those at greater risk of using violence) and adult men to promote healthier relationships with themselves and others
- better integrating responses to domestic and family violence with perpetration-focused prevention of child sexual abuse – mindful of co-occurrence.

**Midwest Aboriginal Men's Empowerment Project:** In 2023, the Geraldton Aboriginal Men's Group sought to address a lack of information and support in relation to family and domestic violence in their community. They approached the WA Centre for Rural Health who teamed up with The Men's Project to deliver the [Modelling Respect and Equality \(MoRE\)](#) program to Aboriginal men of all ages across Geraldton and Mullewa. The project facilitated yarning related to gender norms, healthy and respectful manhood, role modelling, emotions, trauma and violence – and around connection to country, culture and tradition. The yarns worked best when held in familiar outdoor settings around a campfire. Over 20 men participated in the program, sharing experiences of what it is like to be a Yamatji man today. Success factors for the program included flexibility in delivery approach; following where yarns were going; elders sharing stories and knowledge; and use of visual metaphors such as 'planting the seed' for guiding young males on a path towards healthy and respectful relationships. Comments from men who participated included 'We need more programs' and 'Yarning with other men going through the same thing makes you feel like you're not alone'.

## Work with men and boys and those who can positively influence them

As it stands, crucial opportunities for early intervention are being missed. Jesuit Social Services' organisational data points to links between the experience of childhood violence and later contact with the justice system. For example, analysis of our 2023–24 case notes show that 74% of participants in our adult justice programs and 53% of participants in our youth justice programs reported being a victim-survivor of family violence at some stage in their lives (likely under-reported for a range of reasons). The vast majority of the reported experience was exposure to violence in childhood; this was evenly reflected across gender groups.

*"Most of the time you're doing something, like getting solutions to your problems. Every session I have here I leave knowing something I didn't know when I came in."* Student who participated in Changemakers program (see Appendix 2) delivered by The Men's Project.

*"Fantastic! I like how it is about finding healthy and healthier ways for men, rather than calling those things in the man box toxic as this may not help men to change their behaviour."* Teacher who participated in our MoRE program

*72 per cent of participants agreed that phase 2 of the MoRE workshops deepened their understanding of the link between supporting healthier masculinities and preventing violence against women.<sup>1</sup> [Evaluation of MoRE](#)*

**RESTORE:** RESTORE was piloted based in the Melbourne's Children's Court between 2018 and 2022 and trialed restorative approaches to working with young people who had perpetrated family violence. It offered a Family Group Conference to help the young person and their family develop practical solutions to keep people safe and prevent further violence occurring at home after an intervention order (IVO) has been lodged.

In 2018, Jesuit Social Services commenced RESTORE as one of two new pilot projects trialling restorative approaches to working with young people who perpetrate family violence.

By engaging the family in a restorative conferencing intervention at a later point in the cycle of violence, RESTORE aimed to reduce the risk of the young person being criminalised for breaching their IVO. The program sought to address the ensuing harm caused by the violence and prevent future harm from occurring.

A University of Melbourne evaluation found that RESTORE filled a significant service gap and provided a way to rebuild relationships, skills, strategies, and a sense of hope. It asserted that, given the positive outcomes reported by families who participated, there was merit in continuing funding for RESTORE to be able to further test its integrated therapeutic intervention in matters of serious harm associated with adolescent family violence.

*Continues over*

---

<sup>1</sup> Deloitte Access Economics, Evaluating the impact of the Victorian Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) Schools Pilot (report commissioned by The Men's Project, Jesuit Social Services, January 2024), Melbourne.

*"I did not support the police taking out a full intervention order... I think [without RESTORE] it probably would have got worse, I think - I don't see how we would have gotten out of the I guess the spiral that we were in in terms of [my son] being in the court system, the police coming every frickin' second week..."* Mother, RESTORE participant

*"I know that my relationship with my mum has gotten a lot better. It's improved just so much, as well as the relationship with the rest of my family, and that was kind of another... [reason for doing] RESTORE, was kind of making those connections again and those have improved yeah."* Young person, RESTORE participant.

**Recommendation:** Jesuit Social Services recommends that every Australian state and territory have a violence prevention workforce strategy which foregrounds working with men and boys across a range of settings. The strategies should view a range of work as prevention, including work with people of all genders who can influence men and boys (e.g. teachers and elders, social workers, sports coaches); and working with men and boys who are at greater risk of perpetrating violence. Course content, and modes of delivery, must be evidence-based.

**Recommendation:** Jesuit Social Services recommends that governments invest in digital tools to support the capacity of these critical workforces, and that of parents, to confidently foster discussions with men and boys about gender norms and use of violence, and to counter negative influences.

### **Working with people at risk of perpetrating child sexual abuse**

We need a lifecourse approach that links child maltreatment to reducing domestic, family and sexual violence across generations. In partnership with the UNSW we completed Australia's first child sexual abuse perpetration study. The study found that one in five Australian men have sexual feelings towards children and/or have committed child sexual abuse offences, It also found that the majority of Australian men who have viewed child sexual abuse material began such behaviour when they were children. The men with sexual feelings who have sexually offended against children differed from men with no sexual feelings or offending against children on a number of measures including being four times more likely to experience domestic violence as children. While many victim-survivors of violence do not go on to harm others, there is work needed to improve the response to victim survivors of violence (including children) thereby contributing towards ending inter-generational harms.

**WASAPP:** The Worried About Sex and Pornography Project (WASAPP) commenced in 2019, arising from Jesuit Social Services' advocacy for [Stop It Now!](#). We are currently undertaking an action research project in collaboration with the University of Melbourne to develop knowledge regarding harmful sexual behaviour prevention. This knowledge will inform the development and piloting of an online early intervention service for children and young people at risk of engaging in harmful sexual behaviours. In collaboration with the University of Melbourne, we have developed knowledge regarding pathways to the onset of harmful sexual behaviour. We have combined this with the perspectives of national and international experts, and children and young people who have engaged in harmful sexual behaviour, to help guide service development. The findings reported have been published in three academic papers, and additional research is ongoing. These findings are being collated into a scoping study which will guide our development and implementation of a secondary prevention service for young people concerned about their sexual thoughts and behaviours. The options, scale and sustainability of this service are subject to further funding.

*'[An early intervention service] would hopefully be a website with all the written information that I would need to understand if I'm doing the right or wrong thing. Then...pointing towards a text or call service in which I'd be able to access anonymously and talk about what I'm doing. Then have someone tell me is this right, is this wrong. Should I stop? Is there any alternative services that I can access without getting into legal trouble? That would be perfect.'* Young person with lived experience in an interview to guide development of a service for people worried about their sexual behaviour.

**Recommendation:** Jesuit Social Services recommends exploring opportunities to better educate young people on the impacts of pornography. This should include providing robust and informed consent and sex education, sexual health and understanding respectful relationships with consideration of appropriate resourcing of respectful relationships curriculum to ensure teachers are well equipped to foster informative and critical discussions on pornography and its impacts. This should also include investment in online opportunities to influence behaviour, including pop-up warnings on pornography sites, and early intervention services, providing support for people (including children and young people) concerned about their use of pornography and/or sexual thoughts and behaviours (such as Jesuit Social Services' Worried About Sex and Pornography Project and Stop it Now!).

### **3. What is required to work more cohesively across organisations and jurisdictions?**

We are calling for a framework to articulate what we mean when we say we are engaging men and boys.

Over recent years there has been a surge of primary prevention and early intervention programs that are diverse in their objectives and approach. Some programs target young men, others target fathers, or men with at-risk behaviours. Programs operate at the community, organisation and individual level. They can include: face-to-face education, social marketing and media interventions, whole of school or organisation approaches, gender equality and respectful relationships initiatives in workplaces, work with fathers or male caregivers, mobilising men within communities as allies and law and policy reforms addressing men and gender. The facilitators can be community members, professional or leaders. The programs operate in different formats and locations.

While proliferation of programs that target men and boys to prevent violence against women and children indicates a rise in quantity, the quality of these programs needs to be assessed to better understand the merits and fidelity of such work.

**Figure 2:** Levels of evidence for effectiveness<sup>2</sup>



See example of The Men’s Project documentation of practice approaches in [“Perspectives on prevention of gender-based violence: Identifying and disrupting pathways to violence”](#), pp.19–20.

**Recommendation:** To ensure programs that target men and boys are evidence-based and effective, and to guard against low-quality programs, Jesuit Social Services recommends the federal government commission a “stocktake” of prevention and early intervention work taking place across the country. There is a need for a clearer articulation of:

- the types of violence being referred to (e.g. sexual, physical, economic, emotional, child sexual abuse) and patterns of behaviour such as coercive control
- relationships where violence is taking place (intimate partner violence, elder abuse, family abuse, adolescent violence in the home)
- a recognition of duality (e.g. it is possible to be a victim of family violence and be perpetrating adolescent violence at the same time, a perpetrator of intimate partner violence, may also be perpetrating elder financial abuse)
- ways to engage people with lived experience in the delivery of prevention and early intervention programs.

This should be linked to an evidence framework for gender-based violence prevention and early intervention, including minimum standards of evidence.

---

<sup>2</sup> Based on Zwi, K., Woolfenden, S., Wheeler, D., O’Brien, T., Tait, P., & Williams, K. (2007). School-based education programmes for the prevention of child sexual abuse. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 3(1), 1–40. doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD004380.pub3.

## Appendix 1: About Jesuit Social Services' The Men's Project

The Men's Project is a combination of research and programs that enact pragmatic change by working with boys and men in their environments. We:

- complete rigorous research to understand attitudes and behaviours related to men's violence, child sexual abuse, and boy's and men's wellbeing
- work with thousands of adults of all genders each year, across a variety of settings who can positively influence men and boys (facilitating their own self-reflection and enabling action)
- work with adolescent boys and adult men to promote healthier relationships with themselves and others
- work with people at risk of perpetrating child sexual abuse by providing anonymous help and intervening online when they are at risk of offending.

The following contribution draws substantially on the following papers, developed by Jesuit Social Services:

- [Perspectives on prevention of gender-based violence: Identifying and disrupting pathways to violence](#)
- [Submission to NSW Inquiry into the impacts of harmful pornography on mental, emotional and physical health](#)
- [The Man Box 2024](#)
- [Identifying and understanding child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes among Australian men](#)



## Appendix 2: Change Makers

Change Makers is a fully funded innovative early intervention partnership program developed by Jesuit Social Services, The Men's Project, to support young people aged 12–25 to enjoy healthy relationships and live safe, full lives, free from violence.

Working in partnership with community organisations and schools, Change Makers delivers small group sessions with young people, with a focus on boys and young men.

Together, we explore a range of topics designed to build young people's knowledge, skills and confidence about themselves and the world that they live in, including:

- Emotional literacy
- Non-violent problem solving
- Resisting the pressures to support violence
- Building healthy relationships
- Safely standing up for yourself and others
- Healthy identities, including challenging harmful gender attitudes and behaviours.

### Why the focus on boys and young men?

Many boys and young men are facing challenges that adversely affect their wellbeing and behaviour. These include engaging in harmful activities such as perpetrating violence, underperforming in school, engaging in risky behaviours such as illicit drug use and/or alcohol consumption, and experiencing poor mental health.

### Program delivery

Programs typically run over a single term (8 weeks) or multi term (18 weeks) and group sessions are held weekly, between 1 to 1.5 hours. The program can be delivered in a range of settings including secondary schools, flexible learning schools, community organisations and sporting clubs.

### How we work in partnership

No two programs are identical, because no two groups of young people are the same. Led by the voices of the young people in the group, we work and learn alongside our participants and partners to develop and implement the program.

### Building the evidence with our partners

Change Makers is a pilot program aimed at building the evidence base for early intervention initiatives. We systematically assess what works and what doesn't, leveraging our adaptability to refine the program. It is this capacity for adaptation that makes the program truly unique.



## About us

### Jesuit Social Services

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation that works to build a just society by delivering services, advocating for social change and promoting the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities facing disadvantage and marginalisation.

### The Men's Project

The Men's Project supports men and boys to live respectful, accountable and fulfilling lives free from violence and other harmful behaviours.

We work to develop new evidence-informed prevention and early intervention approaches that build capacity to address the underlying drivers of violence and other harmful behaviours.

**For more information about the program and how you can partner with us, please contact:**

**Brett Phillips, Manager**

Early Intervention and Strategic Projects  
[themensproject@jss.org.au](mailto:themensproject@jss.org.au) | 0439 734 053

This program is jointly funded through Family Safety Victoria and the Commonwealth (through the National Partnership on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses 2021-23).