



# The vicious circle of violence and inequality

Just 18 months' ago, Australia became keenly aware of its problems with domestic violence. **Elizabeth Broderick**, Senior Adviser to UN Women, explains why tackling gender inequality is just as important as the Government's \$100m pledge to help abused women

**According to a BBC report, one in six women in Australia experience violence from a current or former partner and, between January and September 2015, 63 women were killed in alleged domestic violence incidents. What is your understanding of the prevalence of domestic violence in Australia, and what issues, if any, are specific to the country?**

The total number of deaths would have probably been around 75 by the end of the year, equating to two murders a week by an intimate partner. There are about 1.4 million women living in Australia today who are either currently living in an intimate relationship characterised by physical violence, or have done so in the past.

Australia is a reasonably wealthy, prosperous and educated nation, and yet one of the issues that has been a challenge right up until the last 18 months has been the lack of awareness of domestic and family violence. When I ask Australians where they think violence against women is a problem, they'll say Afghanistan, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, but hardly any of them will mention Australia. This has changed in the last 12 months and is now on Australia's national agenda. Indeed, the Prime Minister's first public announcement was the Women's Safety Package, which pledges \$100m to combat domestic and family violence. Additionally, Rosie Batty was nominated Australian of the Year last year. She came to that position in such desperately sad circumstances [her son was murdered by her husband] and the nation really responded to that.

**Why are the rates of domestic violence so high in Australia? Is it a particularly macho society?**

Australia isn't a macho society, necessarily; our heritage is a pioneering one, built on hard work and creating a

nation which means there's a 'suck it up', hardworking perspective that permeates the culture. Our nation is also built on the back of immigrant populations and we're a mix of different cultures. When I look at the levels of violence against indigenous women, as well as culturally and linguistically diverse women, the prevalence is much greater. For indigenous women, they're 35 times more likely to be hospitalised because of violence. Women with disabilities suffer much higher rates as well. There is also a view in Australia that domestic violence doesn't happen to wealthy people. In fact, violence against women is a gender inequality issue. It happens everywhere.

**What have been the immediate implications of the Government's Women's Safety Package to Stop the Violence funding package?**

I can't tell you how much the nation has shifted on the issue of domestic and family violence. Not only that, but it is now seen as a workplace issue and I believe Australia has become a world leader in tackling these issues. There's no question that this safety package was welcomed by all sectors of the community. The first public announcement was about funding both primary prevention and innovative technology to keep women safe. There is also increased funding directed at perpetrator programmes as well as supporting women's NGOs that are providing critical services in the sector.

**Do you believe it goes far enough to help women who may be victims of violence?**

There's never going to be enough money to fund what needs to happen, but it's a really good first step. Some of the funding measures will, I think, be very effective. As I said, this is one area of gender inequality that has moved substantially over the last 18 months.



**Whilst the Women's Safety Package is broadly welcomed, some critics say the Government should have included male victims of violence. What is your opinion on this?**

I strongly hold the view that no violence is okay; every victim of violence should be supported. Having said that, the vast majority of domestic violence is perpetrated by men, and a large part of this issue is down to gender inequality. Domestic and family violence is about power and control. Men have the power and control in nations, organisations, households and families.

**You mentioned in your previous interview with us that most Australian businesses recognise that domestic violence is also a workplace issue. In general, what are companies doing to ensure women are safe and feel supported?**

Firstly, they're making it safe for women to disclose their situation in the workplace by training staff members on how to have a conversation about domestic and family violence.

To give an example of the importance of this, one woman I work with, Kristy, lived in an appallingly violent situation. She managed a team of around 30 people and shared an office with another woman. When she'd received an abusive phone call from her husband, which was an habitual occurrence, the woman in her office thought she had been speaking to a customer. When Kristy admitted that it was in fact her husband, her colleague didn't know what to do with that information and kept on with what she was doing. Our research shows that the first response a victim of violence will get when they disclose personal information such as that above will determine whether they ever disclose again. Kristy shut down at that point and was nearly murdered several months later.

Businesses are also introducing innovative policies, such as unlimited domestic violence leave with low evidentiary requirements; this means staff will be granted leave to attend court hearings. Staff are also allowed to keep valuables in the office and have their phone numbers changed. Their workplace will help them develop a personal



Formerly the Sex Discrimination Commissioner for the Australian Human Rights Commission, Elizabeth Broderick has taken on a number of what she hopes will be high-impact roles within sport, the armed forces and corporations. For example, she is Senior Advisor on Private Sector Engagement to UN Women, a United Nations organisation dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. Similarly, she is working with the Australian Federal Police to help create a workforce that is representative of Australian society and has deeper engagement with the national population on issues such as extremism and counter-terrorism.

In addition, Broderick is founder and Chair of Male Champions of Change, a network of influential men, working across all sectors of society, whose common goal it is to elevate the issue of gender equality to a national and international level.

work safety plan. And CEOs are talking about the issue to staff, which helps normalise the conversation and gives licence to others to talk about it too. These are the types of policies I'm seeing in workplaces that are all doing well.

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**As the New South Wales Australian of the Year for 2016, what does this award mean to you and domestic violence campaigners, in general?**

I think 2016 is going to be the year of equality in Australia. David Morrison, whom

I worked closely with on the Male Champions of Change strategy, won 2016 Australian of the Year. His whole platform is to continue advocating for gender equality in Australia. I'll also use my award platform to continue to take the message of gender equality into the most unlikely places: the police forces, military, factories and parliament – places where gender is not regularly discussed.

**You are the founder of Male Champions of Change. How did you engage the support and involvement of influential businessmen and politicians?**

It was about taking the message to their hearts and not just their heads. What I mean by that, is that I could've simply presented them with prevalence data, but this would never have been enough to get people to stand up and take strong

action. So I brought in Rosie Batty – about two months after she lost her son Luke – because I wanted these men to understand that this act was committed to ensure Rosie lived with the trauma every single day of her life. I wanted them to hear Kristy's story; that her husband once cut all the heels off her shoes because he didn't like the fact she was a little bit taller than him; that he'd often call her at work to say he was leaving their six-month old baby at home alone. I wanted these influential men to understand the personal narrative and the reality of this. I don't think they would have stepped up had they just been sent data on violence prevalence.

**In what way would tackling gender inequality help victims of violence?**

As a nation, we cannot accept a situation where more than one woman is murdered a week by an intimate partner. Violence against women doesn't come out of nowhere, it emerges from a society that allows disrespectful attitudes towards women; a society where women are given limited access to economic power. How many women are on the boards of organisations? How many are at decision-making levels of our country? While women remain excluded from those areas, they will be marginalised. This is why we, at Male Champions of Change, are looking at gender equality indicators to assess whether we are becoming more gender equal over time.

