

# Australians' attitudes to violence against women and gender equality:

## The 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS)

### Stakeholder kit



**ANROWS**

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH  
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY  
*to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children*

In partnership with



## Introduction

Launching Friday November 30, the National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) reveals Australians' knowledge of, and attitudes towards, violence against women and gender equality.

Using a representative sample of 17,500 Australians aged 16 years and over, the NCAS is the world's longest-running survey of community attitudes towards violence against women.

The materials in this kit support individuals and organisations to understand and communicate the findings of the NCAS. This kit includes key messages and supporting data from the NCAS findings, as well as a media release, social media content and standard responses to anticipated questions from the public.

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## Key Messages

Key messages have been developed to assist in communication around the 2017 NCAS launch. All key messages are supported by data from the report, and can be used to develop an understanding of how communications around the launch will be framed.

Key message	Supporting messages or data
1. While Australians' attitudes to violence against women and gender equality are improving, there are some disturbing trends.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Australians are more likely to support gender equality and reject violence against women in 2017 than they were in 2013 and 2009.</li> <li>In this time there has been an improvement in attitudes overall, but some areas remain a problem, including some in which there has been a worsening trend.</li> </ul>
2. Many people's knowledge and attitudes to violence against women are out of step with the evidence, and with women's experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fewer are aware that men are more likely than women to use violence in relationships (down 22 percentage points since 1995), and that women are more likely to suffer greater physical harm from this violence (down 8 percentage points since 2009).</li> <li>Contrary to Australian law, 12% disagree that it is against the law for a man to force his wife to have sex with him, and a further 7% did not know the answer to this question.</li> <li>Although in the majority of sexual assault cases the assailant is known to the victim (<a href="#">ABS 2017</a>), 18% believe that women are more likely to be assaulted by a stranger than a known man, and 1 in 6 did not know.</li> </ul>
3. It's concerning that a substantial minority mistrust women's reports of violence, and feel the problem of gender inequality is exaggerated. We need to do more to change these attitudes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nearly half of Australians (42%) think it's common for sexual assault accusations to be used as a way of getting back at men. Even though:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9 out of 10 women who have been sexually assaulted do not report to the police (<a href="#">ABS 2017</a>), and false allegations are rare (see NCAS main report for review of studies).</li> </ul> </li> <li>Half of respondents believe that women mistakenly interpret so-called 'innocent' remarks or acts as being sexist, even though more than half of Australian women have experienced sexual harassment (and women experience this more than men) (<a href="#">ABS 2017</a>).</li> <li>Even though women continue to earn less on average than men in every industry and occupational category in Australia (<a href="#">Workplace Gender Equality Agency</a>), 40% think women exaggerate how unequally women are treated.</li> <li>36% believe many women fail to appreciate all that men do for them.</li> </ul>

Key message	Supporting messages or data
<p>4. Our attitudes to sexual consent are concerning. We need to focus on the abusive behaviour, not women's choices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Australians are more likely to justify forced sex if the woman initiates intimacy by kissing a man first, with up to 15% thinking it's justified in these circumstances.</li> <li>• Nearly 1 in 3 Australians (30%) believe that if a woman sends a nude image to her partner, then she is partly responsible if he shares it without her permission.</li> <li>• Nearly a quarter (23%) think women find it flattering to be persistently pursued, even if they aren't interested.</li> <li>• 1 in 10 believes that if a woman is drunk and starts having sex with a man, but then falls asleep, it is understandable if he continues to have sex with her anyway.</li> <li>• 1 in 5 believes that since women are so sexual in public, it's not surprising that some men think they can touch women without their permission.</li> </ul>
<p>5. No matter who we are or where we come from, building support for gender equality is the key to changing negative attitudes to violence against women.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When people have negative views about women and gender relationships, they are also more likely to hold attitudes supporting violence against women.</li> <li>• Attitudes towards women are fairly consistent across the population, regardless of where you live or how much you money you earn.</li> </ul>
<p>6. We all have a role to play in ending violence against women, by speaking up against abuse, sexism and disrespect.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The majority of Australians say they would be bothered by seeing verbal abuse of a woman (98%) and sexist jokes (76%); however not all of them would take action.</li> <li>• Though a majority of Australians would be bothered by a sexist joke, only 45% said they would take action, 13% would like to act but wouldn't know how, and 18% said they would feel uncomfortable but not act.</li> <li>• We need to empower and support people to speak out against abuse and disrespect towards women.</li> <li>• Australians are likely to have the support of more of their friends than they think when speaking out against the abuse and disrespect of women. This is important because we are more likely to take action if we know we have the support of our friends.</li> </ul>
<p>7. Men and boys have a key role to play in changing attitudes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although attitudes to gender equality and understanding of violence against women are the strongest predictors of attitudinal support for violence, the survey did find that men are more likely to endorse violence-supportive attitudes and are less likely to support gender equality. These attitudes are also more common in male dominated occupations and among people with mainly male friends.</li> <li>• Men are important allies in prevention.</li> </ul>
<p>8. Change is possible. We need to keep the momentum going if we want to prevent violence before it starts.</p>	

## NCAS 2017 Cheat Sheet

As a quick reference point, you can use the 2017 NCAS Cheat Sheet to answer any questions about the survey itself.

Aspect of the survey	Key information
The survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey is the best research available on attitudes in Australia. It has a large, random sample and has been measuring Australians' attitudes to violence against women for over two decades.</li> </ul>
Change over time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is the 4<sup>th</sup> national survey. Previous surveys were conducted in 1995 (n=2,000), 2009 (10,100), 2013 (17,500).</li> <li>Overall change over time is measured using questions from the 2017 NCAS and prior survey waves. New questions are not included.</li> <li>Overall change over time is measured using an average 'score' which is calculated using people's responses to a group of questions. These are not percentages. The numbers describe levels in <i>relation to other time points only</i>, and are not absolute levels of attitudinal support/knowledge.</li> </ul>
Method and sample size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The survey interviews over 17,500 people aged 16 and over by landline and telephone.</li> <li>Interviewing was available in 12 community languages.</li> <li>The proportion of telephone numbers called that resulted in an interview (the response rate) was 17%. This is comparable to other similar surveys across the world. Sample weighting was used to correct the impact of any known imbalances.</li> <li>The survey accurately reflects the diversity of the Australian population. It is census matched and weighting is used to correct any imbalances.</li> <li>Cognitive testing of the questions was undertaken to be sure they were well and easily understood by respondents.</li> <li>Tests of statistical significance and were applied to change over time data. Test of statistical significance and effect size were applied in the analysis of differences between groups (e.g. men vs. women) to ensure differences were both significant and meaningful.</li> <li>Groups of individual questions were validated and used to measure overall concepts.</li> </ul>

Aspect of the survey	Key information
Scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The survey does not ask about individuals' experiences of violence, only about their attitudes and knowledge. The Personal Safety Survey gives the most comprehensive information on prevalence of violence available in Australia.</li> </ul>
Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Themes are measured using 'means' not percentages. The numbers describe levels in <i>relation to other themes only</i>, and are not absolute levels of support for attitudes in a given theme.</li> </ul>
Predictors of attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The numbers show how strongly each factor contributes to attitudes to violence against women, after the impact of other factors included in the survey has been taken into account. It is expressed as a percentage of the 'influence' contributed by all the factors considered in the survey.</li> </ul>
Future reports and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Findings for young people, people from non-English speaking backgrounds and Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders will be released in the first half of 2019.</li> <li>Data tables listing results for every question by all the demographic and contextual factors will be released in the first half of 2019.</li> </ul>
Collaboration and review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The survey is done collaboratively and in partnership with a broad range of national experts and stakeholders: RMIT, the Social Research Centre, The University of Melbourne, UNSW and VicHealth.</li> <li>The survey has been peer reviewed by national and international experts.</li> </ul>

## Standard Responses

With a nationwide response expected to the NCAS research, it is important to be prepared for comments from readers that question findings, or spread misinformation. The below responses have been developed in anticipation of potentially complex or aggressive lines of questioning.

Where possible, responses should also link to where to find out more information – i.e. the summary report housed on the [ANROWS website](#).

Question/statement	Suggested response
Why is the research focused on violence against women? What about violence against men?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The NCAS is funded under the <i>National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022</i> (the <i>National Plan</i>). It measures changes over time in attitudes in order to measure progress under the <i>National Plan</i>.</li> <li>• Violence against <i>anyone</i> is unacceptable, but men and women tend to experience violence in different ways and in different contexts.</li> <li>• Women are nearly three times more likely than men to experience intimate partner violence, and four times more likely than men to experience sexual violence.</li> <li>• This research focuses on the specific problem of violence against <i>women</i>.</li> </ul>
Gender equality doesn't have anything to do with violence against women.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender inequality involves devaluing or disrespecting women or women's contributions. Research has consistently found that these forms of disrespect increase the likelihood of violence against women.</li> <li>• Preventing violence against women starts with challenging attitudes and systems that support gender inequality. The NCAS is one way for us to track that change.</li> </ul>
How does this survey represent Australians – you didn't ask me?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The NCAS has a very large and random sample of 17,500 Australians. It is matched with census benchmarks and weighting is used to correct any imbalances.</li> </ul>

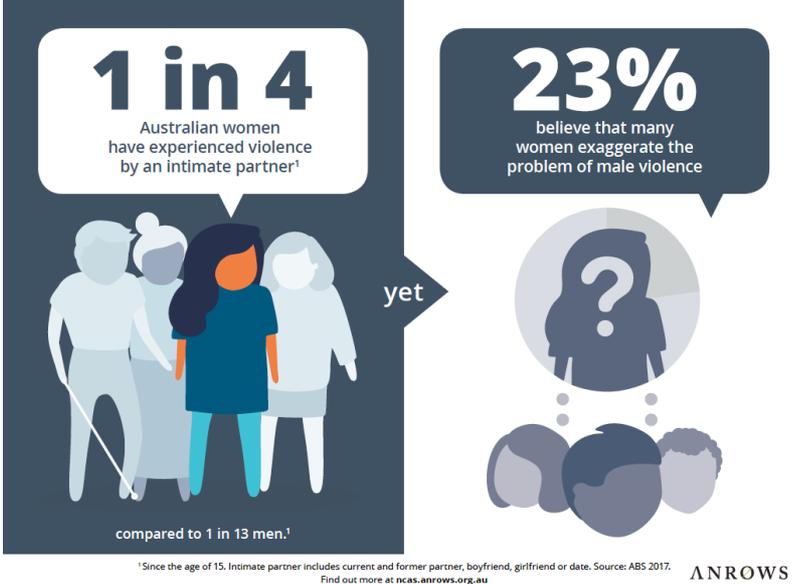
Question/statement	Suggested response
This research is biased.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This survey is world's longest running survey of its kind. It is led by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety in close partnership with leading Australian research institutions: The University of Melbourne, RMIT University, the Social Research Centre, UNSW, and VicHealth.</li> <li>• It uses rigorous and widely accepted methodologies.</li> <li>• The research has also been peer reviewed by national and international experts.</li> </ul>
Can the NCAS tell us <i>why</i> attitudes have changed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This survey measures attitudes at a broad community level but cannot tell us why people hold a particular attitude, or why these have changed. However we can draw on other research to propose some possibilities.</li> </ul>
Why has there been such a large decline in people's knowledge that men are more likely than women to commit domestic violence, and that women are more likely to suffer its harms?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The survey can't tell us why people hold certain attitudes. More research would be required. One possible reason is people believing that improvements in gender equality mean that men and women are <i>now equal</i>. This may lead to the mistaken belief that men and women are now equally likely to be victims of domestic violence, and that the impacts of this violence are the same for both men and women.</li> </ul>
Why are we spending time on exploring attitudes to domestic violence and gender inequality when Australia has so many other important issues to tackle?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On average, one woman a week is killed by her intimate partner.</li> <li>• The problem of violence and disrespect towards women is prevalent and has significant health, social and economic costs for women and society as a whole.</li> <li>• Attitudes are important because they play a role in shaping the world around us, including how we respond to this important problem. We have a role to play in shifting this landscape.</li> </ul>
How does research into violence against women and gender equality change anything? Why don't we put the money into support services instead?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certainly responding to violence against women is of critical importance, so too is preventing this violence <i>before it starts</i>.</li> <li>• Attitudes play an important role in shaping the world around us, and therefore play an important role in prevention.</li> </ul>

Question/statement	Suggested response
<p>This isn't a problem for everyone, aren't the [insert specific demographic] the ones we need to focus on?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The NCAS has shown that attitudes to violence against women and gender equality are consistent across Australia – regardless of location or socio-economic status.</li> <li>• No matter who we are or where we come from, we all have a role to play in changing these negative attitudes.</li> </ul>
<p>How do Australians' attitudes compare to the rest of the world?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct comparisons cannot be made (as different questions are asked internationally), but where comparisons can be made, Australians do fairly well compared to countries around the world.</li> </ul>

Question/statement	Suggested response
<p>What about [insert state] – are some states and territories doing better than others?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The NCAS has shown that attitudes to violence against women and gender equality are consistent across Australia.</li> <li>• Only very minor differences have been found between states and territories and are reported in the main NCAS report.</li> </ul>
<p>If attitudes are getting better, why isn't the problem of violence against women getting any better?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The relationship between attitudes and behaviour is not direct, but rather is complex. It takes considerable time to change such entrenched human behaviours.</li> <li>• While the NCAS did find some positive change, we do still have a long way to go.</li> <li>• It is important that we continue to build on the momentum of change shown in the NCAS results.</li> </ul>
<p>Gender equality is great, but that doesn't mean that women don't lie about sexual assault.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Studies have consistently found that false allegations of sexual assault are rare.</li> <li>• For women, there is little to be gained from lying. They're often not believed, their choices intensely scrutinised, and they risk being publicly shamed for speaking out. These are some of the reasons why 9 out of 10 women who have been sexually assaulted do not report to the police. Our attitudes are part of what shapes this response.</li> <li>• One of the risks of not taking women's claims seriously is that a perpetrator will go on to offend against other women.</li> </ul>
<p>Where can I go to get help?</p>	<p>If you or any other person is in immediate danger, call 000. There are also a range of services to help - including the national sexual assault, domestic and family violence information and support service on 1800 737 732, or Lifeline on 13 11 14.</p>

## Social Media Content #NCAS

These social media tiles can be used to promote the NCAS through your organisation's or personal social media channels. High-resolution versions of the images and links to videos can be retrieved from [ncas.anrows.org.au](http://ncas.anrows.org.au)

Social media resource	Theme
	<p><b>Two minute video of findings:</b>  <a href="http://ncas.anrows.org.au/findings/">ncas.anrows.org.au/findings/</a></p>
	<p><b>30 second video of findings:</b>  <a href="http://ncas.anrows.org.au/findings/">ncas.anrows.org.au/findings/</a></p>
 <p><b>1 in 4</b>      Australian women have experienced violence by an intimate partner<sup>1</sup></p> <p><b>23%</b>      believe that many women exaggerate the problem of male violence</p> <p>yet</p> <p>compared to 1 in 13 men.<sup>1</sup></p> <p><small><sup>1</sup>Since the age of 15. Intimate partner includes current and former partner, boyfriend, girlfriend or date. Source: ABS 2017. Find out more at <a href="http://ncas.anrows.org.au">ncas.anrows.org.au</a></small></p>	<p>Mistrusting women's reports of violence</p>

**9 out of 10**  
women who have been sexually assaulted do not report to the police,<sup>1</sup> and false allegations are rare.<sup>2</sup>

**42%**  
of Australians believe it is common for sexual assault accusations to be used as a way of getting back at men.



Mistrusting women's reports of violence

Source: <sup>1</sup>ABS 2017, Personal Safety Survey. <sup>2</sup>For a review see the 2017 NCAS. Find out more at [ncas.anrows.org.au](http://ncas.anrows.org.au)

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Gender inequality continues to be a problem in Australia. Women earn less pay on average than men across all industries.<sup>1</sup>

**40%**  
of Australians believe that many women exaggerate how unequally women are treated in Australia.



Recognising gender inequality is a problem

Source: <sup>1</sup>Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2017. Find out more at [ncas.anrows.org.au](http://ncas.anrows.org.au)

ANROWS

Sharing intimate images of a person without their consent is illegal.

NEARLY  
**1 in 3**  
Australians  
believe that if a woman sends a nude image to her partner, then she is partly responsible if he shares it without her permission.



Disregarding the need to gain consent

Find out more at [ncas.anrows.org.au](http://ncas.anrows.org.au)

ANROWS

Leaving an abusive partner can be difficult, and often dangerous.



**32%**  
of Australians believe that a female victim who doesn't leave an abusive partner is partly responsible for the abuse continuing.



**We need to focus on the abusive behaviour, not women's choices.**

Minimising violence against women

Find out more at [ncas.anrows.org.au](https://ncas.anrows.org.au) ANROWS

Being controlling is a key risk factor for abuse in relationships.<sup>1</sup>



**34%**  
of Australians think it's natural for a man to want to appear in control of his partner in front of his male friends.



**Healthy relationships are equal and respectful.**

Condoning male peer relations involving aggression and disrespect towards women

Source: <sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation (2005)  
Find out more at [ncas.anrows.org.au](https://ncas.anrows.org.au) ANROWS

There is no excuse for violence.



**1 in 5**  
Australians believe that a lot of what is called domestic violence is really a normal reaction to day-to-day stress and frustration.



Excusing the perpetrator and holding women responsible

Find out more at [ncas.anrows.org.au](https://ncas.anrows.org.au) ANROWS

NEARLY  
**9 out of 10**  
women who have been  
sexually assaulted knew  
their assailant.<sup>1</sup>



yet

**1 in 3**

Australians are unaware that a  
woman is more likely to be sexually  
assaulted by someone she knows  
than by a stranger.



Understanding of sexual violence

Source: <sup>1</sup> Most recent incident data, ABS 2017, Personal Safety Survey.  
Find out more at [ncas.anrows.org.au](https://ncas.anrows.org.au)

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## Media Release

# New research uncovers disturbing Australian attitudes towards violence against women and gender equality

**Embargoed until 12:01am, Friday 30 November 2018**

A major study released today has found that a concerning number of Australians still hold outdated and harmful views about gender equality and violence against women.

The National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS), led by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), demonstrates that while Australians' attitudes towards violence against women and gender equality are improving, too many still hold opinions that are at odds with women's lived experiences and the evidence.

The results show a disturbing downward trend in the percentage of people who recognise that men are more likely than women to use violence in relationships (down 22% points since 1995), or that women are more likely to suffer greater physical harm from this violence (down 8% points since 2009).

Some Australians continue to shift the blame away from men, with 21% believing that 'sometimes a woman can make a man so angry he hits her when he didn't mean to', and 1 in 3 believing rape results from men not being able to control their need for sex.

The survey showed that many people are denying the problem of violence, such as the number of people who think that many women exaggerate the problem of male violence (23%), and the fact that almost half (42%) think it is common for sexual assault accusations to be used as a way of getting back at men.

When it comes to consent, 30% believe that if a woman sends a nude image to her partner, she is partly responsible if he shares it without her permission. Furthermore, 1 in 5 believe that 'since women are so sexual in public, it's not surprising that some men think they can touch women without their permission'.

The continued lack of understanding surrounding the reality of violence against women has led to 1 in 3 Australians being unaware that a woman is more likely to be sexually assaulted by someone she knows than by a stranger.

Results show attitudes are fairly consistent across Australia, regardless of location and socio-economic status.

ANROWS CEO Dr Heather Nancarrow said that the discrepancy between many Australians' knowledge and the evidence was worrying.

"Despite an increase in the number of high profile cases of sexual violence in the media, such as those involved in the #MeToo movement, it is deeply concerning that so many Australians are still not believing women who come forward with claims of violence and sexual assault.

"We're now more likely to understand that violence against women involves more than just physical violence, and to support gender equality – but we need to put this knowledge into action," Dr Nancarrow said.

"We want people to be empowered to step up and act against abuse, violence or disrespect when they see it. This research shows most people would have the support of their peers if they took a stand against violence against women and sexism."

Health promotion foundation VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter, which led the NCAS study in 2009 and 2013, said it was unacceptable that many in the community were quick to dismiss or explain away women's experiences of sexism, violence and abuse.

"There has been a continued decline in the number of people who realise that women are the primary victims of domestic violence, which is ludicrous when we consider that violence against women is still the leading preventable contributor to death and disease in women aged 18-44. The physical and mental health impacts of family violence on women and their children is enormous" Ms Rechter said.

"Promoting equal relationships between women and men at every level of our community is integral to reducing the devastating rates of family violence. If we are to make any headway in achieving this, we have to recognise and believe women's experiences."

Dr Nancarrow said that, although there were many concerning findings, the survey shows that, overall, our attitudes towards gender equality and violence against women are improving.

"Momentum towards ending violence against women is clearly building in Australia. We must continue our efforts and capitalise on the gains being made, so that we can build a safe and respectful future for all," Dr Nancarrow said.

The full NCAS research report can be accessed from 30 November at <https://ncas.anrows.org.au/>

## **Other key findings:**

### **Attitudes to violence against women**

- A fifth believe that 'a lot of what is called domestic violence is really a normal reaction to day-to-day stress and frustration.'

- 32% believe that a female victim who does not leave an abusive partner is partly responsible for the abuse continuing.
- Half believe that women mistakenly interpret 'innocent' remarks or acts as being sexist.
- 40% think women exaggerate how unequally women are treated and 36% believe many women fail to appreciate all that men do for them.

#### **Knowledge of violence against women**

- Most Australians have a good understanding of the problem of violence against women, with 72% acknowledging it as common (up from 68% in 2013).
- Many Australians (40%) say they would not know where to get help for a domestic violence issue.
- There has been a consistent decline in understanding that women are more likely to be sexually assaulted by someone they know than by a stranger (64%, down from 70% in 2009 and 76% in 1995).
- More than 1 in 10 (12%) are not aware that it is against the law for a man to force his wife to have sex with him, and a further 7% said they did not know.

#### **Attitudes to gender equality**

- Most people agree men and women can play a range of roles regardless of gender, however 1 in 7 (14%) still think men are more capable in politics and in the workplace.
- A quarter (25%) of Australians think women prefer men to be in charge of a relationship, and around a third (34%) believe that it is normal for a man to want to appear in control of his partner in front of his male friends.

- Ends -

**About the NCAS:** *The NCAS is the world's longest running survey of community attitudes towards violence against women, with a representative sample of 17,500 Australians aged 16 years and over. It has tracked the changing attitudes of Australians since 1995, with the last two surveys released in 2009 and 2013. The NCAS is delivered in partnership with RMIT University, the Social Research Centre, The University of Melbourne, the University of New South Wales and VicHealth.*