

Submission  
No 40

**INQUIRY INTO EDUCATION LEGISLATION  
AMENDMENT (PARENTAL RIGHTS) BILL 2020**

**Organisation:** Women's Safety NSW

**Date Received:** 27 February 2021

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26 February 2021

The Hon. Mark Latham, MLC, Chair  
Portfolio Committee No. 3 - Education  
Parliament House, 6 Macquarie Street  
Sydney, NSW 2000

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**RE: Inquiry- Education Legislation Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill 2020**

Women's Safety NSW thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into the Education Legislation Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill 2020 ('the Bill').

**About us**

Women's Safety NSW is a peak representative body for women's specialist domestic and family violence services in NSW – including the [Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services \('WDVCAS'\)](#) who supported 53,527 women last year as part of the NSW Government's [Safer Pathway](#) Program, as well as a range of other women's specialist domestic and family violence services, such as women's health and counselling services, Staying Home Leaving Violence, women's shelters and refuges, women's resource and case management services, and women's legal services. Women's Safety NSW advocates on behalf of our members for systemic reform to increase women's safety, justice and wellbeing in the context of domestic and family violence.

**Submission**

Women's Safety NSW endorses the ACON submission to this Inquiry as summarised in their Executive Summary:

*"This Bill threatens the right of every child to a safe school environment and to receive a broad and fulfilling education. The Bill, if given effect, would amount to erasure of, and misinformation about, people in our communities, with significant negative impacts for them, their families and loved ones. It [would] deteriorate health outcomes, particularly mental health outcomes, as well as increase non-participation rates in school and inhibit students' right to a comprehensive education."*

Additionally, as an organisation charged with advocating for improved measures to address domestic and family violence, Women's Safety NSW holds significant concerns in relation to the proposed Bill. Specifically, **if enacted, the new laws would act to counter our efforts in tackling domestic and family violence in NSW** by interfering with our primary prevention activities.

The NSW Government's [Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint for Reform 2016-2021, Safer Lives for Women, Men and Children](#) ('Blueprint') represents the current

reform framework for addressing domestic and violence in NSW. The Blueprint was developed through extensive consultation with hundreds of people affected by domestic and family violence as well as the people working tirelessly to stop it. Within the Blueprint, there are six blueprint actions. The first of these is: **preventing domestic and family violence**.

In implementing this action, the NSW Government recognises that: ***“Violence is prevented through changes to attitudes, social norms and structures that underpin domestic and family violence.”***<sup>1</sup>

The two primary strategies for preventing domestic and family violence under this action include:

- I. **Embedded population-wide primary prevention activities** that are effective in changing the underlying causes of domestic and family violence; and
- II. **An effective system that addresses both the causes and symptoms of domestic and family violence.**

The NSW Government has signed up to [Our Watch's Change the Story Framework: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia](#) ('Change the Story').<sup>2</sup> This guiding document recognises violence against women and their children as prevalent but preventable. To prevent it, we need to address its primary drivers.

*“Although there is no single cause of violence against women and their children, the latest international evidence shows there are certain factors that consistently predict - or drive - higher levels of violence against women. These include beliefs and behaviours reflecting disrespect for women, **low support for gender equality and adherence to rigid or stereotypical gender roles, relations and identities.**”*<sup>3</sup> [our emphasis added]

Indeed, the [National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey \(2017\)](#) ('NCAS'),<sup>4</sup> which collected the views of a representative sample of 17,500 Australians aged 16 years and over, found:

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<sup>1</sup> NSW Health, (2016) [Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint for Reform 2016-2021. Safer Lives for Women, Men and Children](#), Women NSW, Sydney, Australia, <[http://domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/379849/dfv-blueprint-for-reform.pdf](http://domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/379849/dfv-blueprint-for-reform.pdf)>.

<sup>2</sup> Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth (2015) *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*, Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia, <<https://media-cdn.ourwatch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/05/21025429/Change-the-story-framework-prevent-violence-women-children-AA-new.pdf>>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Webster, K., Diemer, K., Honey, N., Mannix, S., Mickle, J., Morgan, J., Parkes, A., Politoff, V., Powell, A., Stubbs, J., & Ward, A. (2018). Australians' attitudes to violence against women and gender equality. Findings from the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) (Research report, 03/2018). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS,

- a) *Having a low level of support for gender equality is the strongest predictor of attitudinal support for violence; and*
- b) *Attitudes 'denying gender inequality is a problem' and 'promoting rigid gender roles, stereotypes and expressions' have the first and second strongest influence on attitudes towards violence against women.*

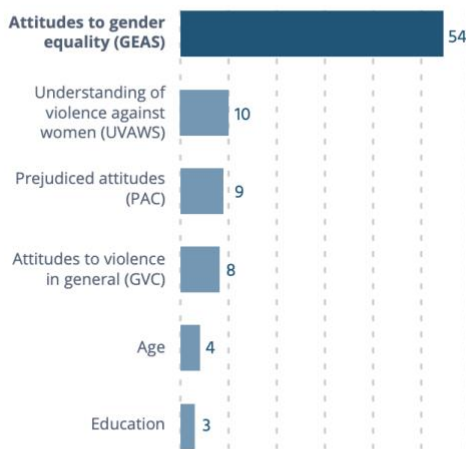
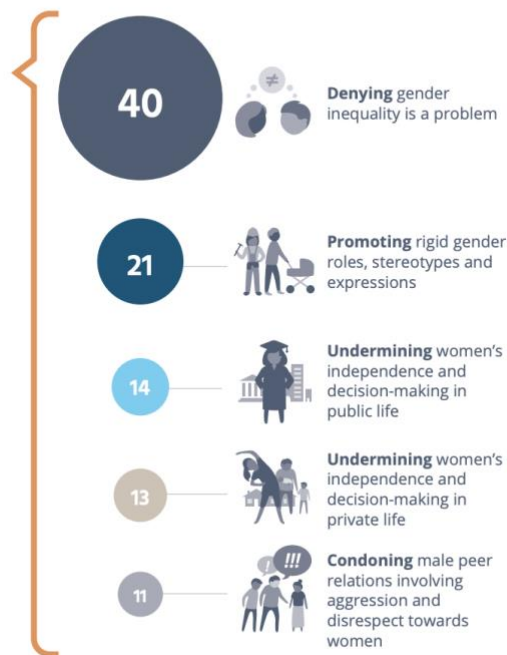
 Top 6 predictors of attitudinal support for violence<sup>i</sup>

 Influence of gender equality themes in predicting attitudinal support for violence<sup>ii</sup>


Figure 1: Australians' attitudes to violence against women and gender equality. Findings from the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey ANROWS

The Change the Story framework sets out the key actions needed to prevent violence through legislative, institutional and policy responses. Importantly, these actions must be implemented in a range settings such as workplaces, **schools**, community organisations, sports clubs, media and popular culture, as well as being tailored to the context and needs of different groups.<sup>5</sup>

The essential actions to address the gendered drivers of violence against women across these settings include the following:

<<https://d2rn9qno7zhxgg.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/05062144/anr001-NCAS-report-WEB-1019.pdf>>.

<sup>5</sup> Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth (2015) *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*, Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia, <<https://media-cdn.ourwatch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/05/21025429/Change-the-story-framework-prevent-violence-women-children-AA-new.pdf>>.



- 1) Challenging condoning of violence against women;
- 2) Promoting women's independence and decision-making in public life and relationships;
- 3) **Fostering positive personal identities and challenging gender stereotypes and roles;**
- 4) **Strengthening positive, equal and respectful relations between and among women and men, girls and boys; and**
- 5) **Promoting and normalise gender equality in public and private life.**

**Schools are a high priority setting when addressing the gendered drivers of violence against women.** This is because of their reach and their ability to influence knowledge and attitudes for an entire generation. Promoting gender equality, fostering positive personal identities and challenging outdated gender norms and expectations in schools will promote greater safety and respect for generations to come.

*"Working with schools to prevent gender-based violence makes sense. Australian schools offer an existing structure to promote gender equality and respectful relationships to a large workforce and near universal reach to Australia's children and young people. Children and young people are a key focus for the primary prevention of gender-based violence for several reasons. They are still forming their knowledge and attitudes and are open to guidance and support. They are also beginning to form relationships and ideas about acceptable relationship behaviour. Respectful Relationships Education can help children act as agents for change, building skills for them to advocate for gender equality and non-violence and exercise a positive influence on their societies and future generations."<sup>6</sup>*

Women's Safety NSW maintains significant concerns that if the Bill were to be given effect, teachers and schools would be prevented from supporting children and young people in the development of healthy attitudes towards gender diversity and equality, social inclusion and respect in relationships.

We thank you for your consideration of our submission. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require more information or would like to discuss. We are happy to appear before the Committee as required.

Yours faithfully,

Hayley Foster

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<sup>6</sup> Our Watch, (2019) *Respectful Relationships Education Toolkit*, Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia, < <https://media-cdn.ourwatch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/11/24235934/Respectful-relationships-education-full-toolkit.pdf>>.