

Say No To Violence

Violence against women is the most widespread human rights abuse in the world. Every day, thousands of women and girls are abused in their own homes. They are raped in armed conflict or murdered by their families. They are attacked for speaking up and defending women's rights.

It is a worldwide scandal that violence against women is allowed, excused or overlooked. Amnesty International is bringing together men and women in a campaign to stop violence against women in Australia and around the world.

Justice not excuses

Governments have an obligation to eliminate violence against women, including violence by family members and government officials. The Stop Violence Against Women Campaign is holding governments to account for their failure to protect women and urging governments to live up to their obligations.

Amnesty International's agenda for change is a challenge to the international community, governments, local communities, men and women and each one of us.

Violence in Australia

Throughout Australia, a wide range of worthwhile initiatives exist to address violence against women, from government campaigns to the tremendous work being done by those working in the violence prevention field. However, women in Australia are still experiencing unacceptable levels of violence:

- At least one woman is murdered every week in Australia by a current or former partner (*National Homicide Monitoring Programme 2003-2004 Annual Report, Australian Institute of Criminology*).
- 126,100 women experienced a sexual assault in the last 12 months—345 each day (*Personal Safety Survey Australia 2006, Australian Bureau of Statistics*).
- 19 per cent of women have been stalked since the age of 15 (*Personal Safety Survey Australia 2006, Australian Bureau of Statistics*).
- 41 per cent of women have personally experienced sexual harassment (*Sexual Harassment: 20 Years On, HREOC 2003*).
- There were between 3,000 and 4,000 incidents of drink spiking in Australia in the space of one year, with four out of five victims being female. Sexual assault occurs in approximately one third of all cases—up to 1,300 per year (*National project on drink spiking : investigating the nature and extent of drink spiking in Australia, Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy 2004*).

The costs of violence against women

Government research puts the total cost of domestic violence in 2002/03 at \$8.1 billion (*The cost of domestic violence to the Australian Economy, Access Economics for the Office of the Status of Women,*

2004). Domestic violence in Australia contributes to ill-health and premature death for women aged 15-44 years, than any other single factor. Two thirds of women experience some form of physical or sexual violence in their lives.

Immediate impacts often described for children include emotional and behavioral problems, lost school time and poor school performance, adjustment problems, stress, reduced social competence, bullying and excessive cruelty to animals, running away from home, and relationship problems (*Economic Costs of Domestic Violence, 2002, Laing and Bobic*).

This is the cost of domestic violence alone. In Australia, domestic violence is the most prevalent form of violence against women, but nevertheless, numerous other forms of violence exist, including sexual violence, stalking, sexual harassment, trafficking, forced marriages, so-called 'honour' crimes, and murder.

A conservative estimate of the total annual cost of rape and sexual assault alone exceeds \$400 million annually across Australia (*Blumel et al 1993*).

Social and health costs of violence against women include social and psychological consequences. These include: anxiety, depression and other emotional distress, physical stress symptoms, suicide attempts, alcohol and drug abuse, sleep disturbances, reduced coping and problem solving skills, loss of self esteem and confidence, social isolation, fear of starting new relationships, living in fear, and other major impacts on quality of life (*Economic Costs of Domestic Violence, 2002, Laing and Bobic*). Many of these consequences result in a direct cost to Australia's health and welfare systems.

While many worthwhile initiatives are addressing the problem, clearly more needs to be done to stop violence against women. Women across the country cannot count on the same level of protection against violence, or the same resources to deal with abuse. There is no national strategy to coordinate efforts or expertise among the states and territories, different government agencies, and with the non-government sector.

What Can We Do?

Having read the above information you may think the problem is all too big and huge a problem. However every action even small ones can make a difference. By thinking globally and acting locally, perhaps we can begin to both raise awareness of the enormity of the problem and take action that will help make our Hawkesbury community a safer place for women and children.

Support the Women's Cottage 'Say No to Violence against Women and Children' campaign by

- Displaying a Say No to Violence Poster in you business, office or workspace
- Pick up a Say No To Violence Action Pack available from the Women's Cottage or request an electronic version to be email to you or download the pack from our website www.womenscottage.org.au.
- Support anti violence campaigns locally and globally