Understanding, monitoring and responding to resistance and backlash

A report prepared by
Our Watch for Respect Victoria

Acknowledgement of Country

Our Watch & Respect Victoria acknowledge and pay our respects to the traditional owners of the land on which our offices are located, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation.

We also acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of Country across Australia and pay our respects to them, their cultures and their Elders past, present and future.

Acknowledgements

Purpose of the Report

This Report outlines the growing evidence base in relation to resistance and backlash. It is presented as an initial approach for testing and reflection and was developed with the intention of providing Respect Victoria with the current evidence base to inform their work.

Author

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Introduction & Report Summary

Background

Resistance and backlash to primary prevention of violence against women is a complex, interrelated and contextual phenomenon that occurs across different levels and settings of Australian society. This research project and report contributes to the growing body of theory and evidence that seeks to better understand the drivers of resistance, and develop strategies to identify, monitor, minimise and respond to resistance.

If the goal of primary prevention of violence against women is to prevent violence, there is also a responsibility to reflect on how prevention efforts may trigger violence in the form of overtly hostile, aggressive and abusive anti-feminist backlash directed towards women, prevention practitioners and organisations. At the same time, research and analysis demonstrate that the more passive forms of resistance to primary prevention —denying the gendered drivers of violence against women, or disavowing responsibility to address them, or to reflect on complicity in perpetuating sexist and patriarchal norms, practices and structures— underpin these more aggressive and violent forms of backlash. It is therefore important to understand, monitor and develop strategies to prevent and respond to the whole spectrum of different forms of resistance.

- **Part One** situates the research project within the context of frameworks for the primary prevention of violence against women and discusses backlash as one of the reinforcing factors for this violence. It also outlines the scope and methodology of the project.

- **Part Two** provides a definition of resistance and backlash, and establishes the relationship between resistance and masculinities and male privilege. It reviews existing literature on institutional resistance and on the ways in which institutions themselves are gendered. This section also describes some of the potential drivers of resistance and points to some key settings where resistance can occur.

- **Part Three** considers the eight different forms of resistance and backlash theorised by Flood, Dragiewicz and Pease (2018, 2020), illustrating the different ways they can manifest at individual, community, organisational and institutional levels.

- **Part Four** discusses the importance of actively monitoring resistance, and outlines an approach for monitoring resistance to primary prevention of violence against women interventions in institutions and organisations.

- **Part Five** explores strategies to minimise resistance before it occurs, as well as strategies to respond to resistance. It concludes by proposing action-based responses which correspond to the eight forms of resistance outlined in Part 3.

Part Six concludes the report by outlining several opportunities for further research and examination of resistance and backlash to primary prevention of violence against women.

Part 1 - Resistance and backlash to primary prevention of violence against women

The national framework that guides primary prevention of violence against women in Australia, *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*, points to the consensus in the international literature that it is gender inequality that sets the underlying conditions for violence against women.[1] The first edition of this document noted that:

> Gender inequality is maintained and perpetuated today through structures that continue to organise and reinforce an unequal distribution of economic, social and political power and resources between women and men; limiting social norms that prescribe the type of conduct, roles, interests and contributions expected from women and men; and the practices, behaviours and choices made on a daily basis that reinforce these gendered structures and norms (2015, p.8).

Drawing on the socioecological model, *Change the story* identifies the need for gender inequality to be addressed at individual, community and organisational, institutional, and societal levels in order to prevent violence against women (Figure 1).

Change the story identifies four specific manifestations of gender inequality that are associated with higher rates of violence against women. Referred to as the 'gendered drivers' of violence, these are:

1. ***Condoning of violence against women*** (by justifying, excusing, trivialising and downplaying violence and shifting blame for violence onto victims).

2. ***Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life*** (playing out through ideas of male control and dominance in sexual and romantic relationships as well as in the social sphere through women's unequal access to resources, power and decision-making).

3. ***Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity*** (hierarchical views about the roles and capacities of men and women, which play out in both individual behaviour and in organisational and institutional practices, social structures and social and cultural norms).

4. ***Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise***

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[1] Violence against women is defined as "any act of gender-based violence that causes or could cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of harm or coercion, in public or private life" (United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993).

Note: This Report was written prior to the publication of the second edition of *Change the story* (2021). However, this introductory section and some references, where appropriate, have been updated to refer to the second edition prior to its publication in June 2022.

aggression, dominance and control (including male peer and organisational cultures that privilege men's relationships with other men over those with women and reinforce stereotypical and aggressive forms of masculinity).

While gender inequality is the necessary condition for violence against women, it is not the only or the most prominent factor in every context. Gender inequality cannot be disentangled from other social injustices because gendered inequality frequently intersects with other forms of structural and systemic discrimination, inequality and injustice. This means that the value afforded to women and men is not afforded in the same way for all women or all men, and that our society, institutions and organisations are shaped by those intersections. Gender inequality and these other forms of oppression play out in many ways and at many levels to create the social context for violence against women. This social context means that other forms of systemic social, political and economic discrimination and disadvantage intersect with gender inequality and play a role in influencing the prevalence and dynamics of violence against women (Our Watch 2021, pp. 28-29).

There are also a range of 'reinforcing factors' which, while not sufficient in themselves to predict violence, can increase the probability, frequency or severity of violence against women. These reinforcing factors are:

1. ***Condoning of violence in general*** (especially in conjunction with gendered norms and practices associated with masculinity where our society normalises, condones and valorises violence that is masculinised).

2. ***Experience of, and exposure to, violence*** (including gendered violence but also violence in childhood and other forms of violence such as racist violence, lateral and community violence, armed conflict or war).

3. ***Factors that weaken prosocial behaviour*** (specifically the interaction between social norms relating to alcohol, and social norms relating to gender, which can increase the likelihood, frequency or severity of violence against women, rather than just the consumption of alcohol itself).

4. ***Resistance and backlash to prevention and gender equality efforts*** (explained further below).

The reinforcing factors are often misidentified as causes of men's violence against women and used to employ and justify resistance to primary prevention of violence against women approaches. For example, alcohol and other substance use and poor mental health are sometimes held up as justifications for violence where perpetrators are framed as 'good men' whose violence was outside their 'normal behaviour' (as discussed further on pages 12-17). While the reinforcing factors are an important part of the picture and can play a role in or contribute to men's violence against women, they are not sufficient in and of themselves to explain this violence. When viewed in isolation the reinforcing factors divert attention away from where it needs to be – on the factors that are *driving* this violence.

A focus on the drivers of violence against women is key to a primary prevention approach – it highlights the need to work across the whole population and across the socioecological model and it situates the prevention of violence as a structural and societal responsibility to address the

unequal gendered norms, practices and structures that maintain gender inequality in public and private life. It is in this context that this report focuses on issues of resistance and backlash – both as a reinforcing factor, but also as inextricably linked to the drivers themselves.

In contrast to an individualistic approach to changing violent behaviour, a primary prevention approach holds to account entire groups of people for the prevention of violence. It demands a social response to a social problem and seeks to engage the whole population in the task of shifting the underlying drivers of violence. While many respond positively and recognise the

THE PROBLEM

Violence against women is serious, prevalent and driven by gender inequality

Gendered drivers of violence against women

Driver 1.	**Driver 2.**	**Driver 3.**	**Driver 4.**
Condoning of violence against women	Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life	Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity	Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control

Underlying **social context** for violence against women

SOCIAL CONTEXT

Gender inequality and other forms of **oppression**

such as racism, ableism, ageism, classism, cissexism and heteronormativity
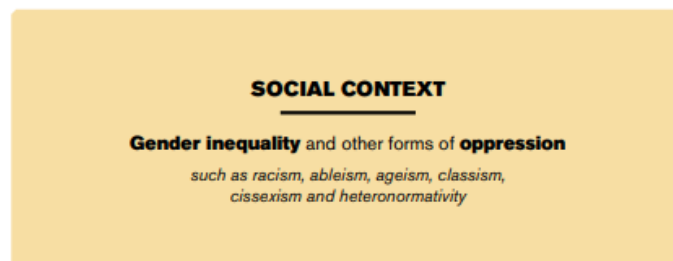
Factors that reinforce violence against women

REINFORCING **Factor 1.**	REINFORCING **Factor 2.**	REINFORCING **Factor 3.**	REINFORCING **Factor 4.**
Condoning of violence in general	Experience of, and exposure to, violence	Factors that weaken prosocial behaviour	Resistance and backlash to prevention and gender equality efforts

These drivers and reinforcing factors play out at every level of society: from individual attitudes and behaviours, to social norms, organisational cultures and practices, policies, laws, and institutions.

Figure 1 The interactions between gendered drivers of violence against women and the reinforcing factors (Our Watch 2021)

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need to 'play their part', this population-wide approach also elicits a breadth of resistance, ranging from denial that gender inequality is a problem let alone a causal factor of violence against women, to backlash in the form of threats of violence (e.g., death threats and sexual assault) (Our Watch 2019). In other words, many people tend to view violence against women as a result of individual pathology *only,* rather than gendered structures, norms and practices in which the larger group of people and communities—especially men who are non-violent— are complicit (and sometimes colluders). Hence, people are disinclined to accept primary prevention efforts based on these broader explanations.

As discussed above, backlash —where male dominance, power or status is challenged— is identified in *Change the story* as one of four factors that reinforce the gendered drivers of violence against women. When power relations are hierarchical and dynamics that are perceived as 'natural', 'traditional' or 'biological' come under threat due to social change, violence or the threat of violence may be seen as a justified response – one that seeks to uphold the 'natural order of things'.

For example, men who hold more stereotypical beliefs around their role as providers (i.e., 'breadwinner masculinities') may be violent towards their partners who have more economic and social resources (e.g., higher income, employment, social and economic status etc.) (Our Watch, 2021, p. 32-33; see also True, 2012). For example, Zhang and Breunig (2021) find that when individual relationships violated the 'breadwinner norm' (the assumption that men should be breadwinners and earn more than women), there was a 35% increase in the likelihood of intimate partner violence and a 20% increase in emotional abuse against women.

Backlash not only manifests among individuals, but within communities, workplaces, organisations, institutions, policies, governments, media reporting, and so on. Whenever and wherever there are attempts at changing existing power dynamics and status quo, resistance and backlash is present.

There is a growing body of Australian and international research and evidence that identifies the multifaceted, complex and contextual nature of resistance and backlash to primary prevention approaches to preventing violence against women and gender equality initiatives more broadly (Flood, Dragiewicz and Pease 2018, 2020; Flood, O'Donnell, Brewin and Myors 2021).

Resistance is an inevitable response to social change, where commonly, those with existing power seek to maintain the status quo by resisting the perceived or actual loss of power and privilege (Flood et al., 2018; Flood and Pease, 2005; Our Watch 2019). The gendered nature of existing political, economic and social structures, practices and norms results in resistance and backlash stemming primarily from those who benefit from the patriarchal status quo in which (white) men dominate power and decision-making structures (Our Watch, 2019).

The terms 'backlash' and 'resistance' are often used interchangeably.[2] Resistance can involve both passive and active, implicit and explicit, formal and informal opposition to change that a particular idea or initiative promotes (Mergaert and Lombardo, 2014). Flood et al. (2018, p. 8) define resistance as resistance *to* something: "an active pushing back against progressive programs, policies and perspectives, and its purpose is the maintenance or reinforcement of gender inequalities".

Importantly, resistance is a subset of broader gendered practices and processes that sustain the gendered drivers of violence against women, and which challenge, oppose and push back against gender equality efforts. It is a form and exercise of power and control in the struggle over change, where often, "fundamental values and principles are at stake" (Agócs 1997, p. 920). In the case of primary prevention of violence against women, this struggle is over the gendered order that shapes male privilege and advantage and access to power.

Flood, Dragiewicz and Pease (2018; 2020) conceptualise backlash as an extreme and more active form of resistance that seeks to re-establish an idealised past where social relations benefitted those who were in positions of power (e.g., gendered division of labour, men's decision-making in homes, breadwinner masculinities):

> *Backlash is a response to actual or perceived challenges to existing hierarchies of power. It is a reaction against progressive social change that seeks to prevent further change from*

> *happening and reverse those changes… Backlash is a reaction against emancipatory political objectives, rather than the reversal of established hierarchies of power (Flood et al, 2018, p. 8).*

It is useful to think of the various forms of resistance and backlash as existing on a continuum. As outlined in the latter parts of this report, the more 'passive' or less obviously aggressive forms of resistance that manifest in a wide range of behaviours and attitudes, practices, structures and systems, underpin and reinforce the more extreme versions of backlash (including violence) to primary prevention of violence against women approaches and its proponents.

Scope and methodology of the research

The objective of this research project and report is to identify existing and potential strategies to monitor and respond to resistance and backlash, with the ultimate goal of minimising and preventing it. It aims to expand on and contribute to existing understandings of resistance and backlash to primary prevention of violence against women change initiatives, movements and processes in Australia and identify potential avenues to anticipate and respond, with a key focus on institutional and organisational forms of resistance and backlash.

Institutional and organisational resistance was prioritised as this is an area that has received less attention in the primary prevention of violence against women

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[2] Backlash and resistance strategies can also be used by progressive movements in reaction to regressive actions and inactions by individuals, organisations, institutions and societal norms, practices and structures. However, for the purposes of this research, resistance and backlash are terms used to refer to

negative responses to efforts that seek to transform current gender inequalities and address the gendered drivers of violence against women.

sector; however, it is identified as a critical component for the success of overall prevention efforts. This includes examining the intersections of resistance displayed by individuals (who make up institutions) and patterns of resistance by the gendered institutions themselves (see pages 29-33).

This research project began with a review of academic literature of theoretical and empirical research from a range of disciplines and fields. This review prioritised feminist and masculinities scholarship, with a focus on scholarship on violence against women, gender and organisations, media studies, feminist institutionalism, gender mainstreaming, and public health. Literature on the themes of diversity and inclusion also made key contributions. Additionally, the review drew on grey literature produced by organisations and government bodies in similar fields.

Apart from a few key resources, initial online searches indicated a lack of both theoretical and practice-focused research on resistance and backlash to primary prevention of violence against women, and even gender equality change initiatives more broadly. This was the case for both Australian and international literature. Resistance and backlash to gender mainstreaming in organisations, especially research institutions in Europe, was one of the most well documented and analysed forms of institutional resistance. Given the institutional and organisational focus of this research project, this small body of evidence was influential in developing the conceptual and research approach.

To develop knowledge around what resistance and backlash looks like in practice, informal conversations were held with stakeholders working in the prevention of violence against women sector in Victoria. These stakeholders generously shared their thoughts on current understandings of resistance and backlash and their experiences of resistance and backlash to their work. Most of these conversations were recorded with consent, and if not, notes were taken to inform the analysis.

In order to have open and candid conversations, these stakeholders have been de-identified in this research report. These conversations were analysed with a focus on the 8 forms of resistance and backlash conceptualised by Flood et al., (2018, 2020; see Part 2 & 3) to provide illustrative examples of what these different forms of resistance look like. There was also a focus on strategies stakeholders used to respond to resistance and backlash in their work, both responding to individuals and to institutional and organisational norms, structures and practices.

However, the short nature of the research project and availability of some stakeholders that coincided with the timing of this stage of the project means there is potential for further qualitative data to be gathered to continue building empirical understanding of resistance.

The research included specific efforts to identify literature and stakeholders that could help illuminate some of the different ways that resistance and backlash play out across Australia's diverse community. This was attentive to whether and how forms of resistance differ according to the specific focus of prevention and gender equality strategies, the issues or audiences they target, and the settings they are implemented in. The process of identifying relevant stakeholders with policy and practice knowledge and experience included efforts to seek out those with experience or expertise working with population groups that experience multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage

or marginalisation.

Due to the short nature of the research project, as well as the broader context and climate in the prevention sector in Victoria and Australia more broadly, there are future opportunities to expand on these efforts to understand resistance and backlash from multiple standpoints. Additionally, efforts were made to analyse instances of resistance and backlash that were reinforced by intersectional discrimination contained in alternate sources of data, such as quantitative surveys, media reporting and online discourses. This informed analysis of other prevention initiatives addressing plural power dynamics such as racism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism and how they may be met with intensified resistance.[3]

Given the research focus on masculinities and resistance as the denial and defence of male privilege the project also considered the intersection of different forms of power and privilege in order to understand and provide examples of the drivers of resistance and help build knowledge on how to respond to it (Flood et al 2018; Flood and Pease 2005; Our Watch 2019; Pease 2008).

Lessons can be learned from attempts to engage men at the intersection of, for example, race (white) and class/ socioeconomic status (high-income earners) in particular settings which may affect the forms of resistance, such as white and male dominated industries (such as the research conducted by Foley et al., 2020 with pilots and workers in automotive trade industries).

As a phenomenon, resistance and backlash is contextual, adaptive and fluid, manifesting in different ways across the socioecological model and within different settings, making it difficult to capture in a methodical way that can then inform strategies to effectively respond to it. Classification and categorisation of what constitutes different forms of resistance and backlash is often subjective. Moreover, institutions and organisations can be at different points along the primary prevention (or gender equality) journey. Therefore, in line with Our Watch's *Putting the prevention of violence against women into practice: How to Change the story* handbook, a reflective practice approach was prioritised to help think about how and where resistance manifests, and from whom (Our Watch 2017).

Combined, this research informed the development of a provisional approach to monitoring resistance and backlash in institutional and organisational settings. To inform the creation of this approach the project analysed existing change initiatives and consulted stakeholders who are already working within institutions to implement primary prevention and broader gender equality initiatives. In line with the institutional/organisational focus, Our Watch's Workplace Equality and Respect (WER) approaches and guidance documents were used to inform the thinking in how to best approach this task.[4] Workplace Equality and Respect offers a step-by-step process that enables organisations to identify key actions to make lasting change and a suite of freely available tools and resources that help support organisations to take action.

The monitoring approach centres a reflective practice approach to identify where resistance may be occurring across formal and informal institutions. It asks practitioners and organisations to

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[3] See for instance: Our Watch, (2018), Changing the Picture; and Rainbow Health, (2020), Pride in Prevention.

[4] Our Watch (2021), Workplace Equality and Respect, https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au.

provide evidence of implementing primary prevention to then reflect on the different examples of resistance and what forms are manifesting (e.g., denial and/or co-option). By identifying the different forms of resistance to the initiative or commitment, the approach is intended to be a resource that can help practitioners and organisations find the best strategies to respond.

The goal of this research and monitoring approach is to contribute to the nascent body of evidence on resistance and backlash to primary prevention of violence against women to support the implementation and realisation of violence prevention change efforts. As this kind of work is relatively new, it is presented as an initial approach for testing and reflection, one that can provide a basis for future development and refinement. There are many opportunities to continue building knowledge and sharing holistic strategies and best practice to respond to individual and institutional forms of resistance and backlash.

Part 2 - Understanding resistance and backlash

Resistance to primary prevention of violence against women is both collective and individual and comes from across communities (Flood et al., 2018, p. 10). Attitudinal data provides a snapshot of dominant attitudes, beliefs and values in Australia that uphold and support resistance to addressing the gendered drivers of violence.

Results from the National Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women Survey (NCAS) (Webster et al., 2018) show that, in Australia, 35% of men and 32% of women continue to demonstrate attitudes supportive of violence against women and resistant to gender equality. Some concerning specifics include:

- 40% of people deny the continued persistence of gender inequality, agreeing 'Many women exaggerate how unequally women are treated in Australia.'
- 50% of people agreed that 'Many women mistakenly interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist.'
- 20% of people agreed that 'Women often flirt with men just to be hurtful.'
- 36% of people agreed that 'Many women fail to fully appreciate all that men do for them.'
- 16% of people agreed that 'there's no harm in men making sexist jokes about women when they are among their male friends.'
- 10% of people agree that 'discrimination against women is no longer a problem in the workplace in Australia.'

In addition to this attitudinal resistance to the persistence of gender inequalities in women's private and public lives, since 1995 there seems to be a decline in understanding that men are more likely to perpetrate domestic violence and women are more likely to be victims (Webster et al., 2018). This includes a substantial minority of Australians having concerning attitudes that support and condone the gendered drivers of violence against women:

- 23% of Australians agree that 'Many women tend to exaggerate the problem of male violence.'
- 43% of Australians agree that 'Women going through custody battles often make up or exaggerate claims of domestic violence in order to improve their case.'
- 30% of Australians agree that 'If a woman sends a nude image to her partner, then she is partly responsible if he shares it without her permission.'
- 12% of Australians agree that 'Women often say 'no' when they mean 'yes'.'
- 21% of Australians agree that 'Since some women are so sexual in public, it's not surprising that some men think they can touch women without permission.'
- 33% of Australians agree that 'Rape results from men not being able to control their need for sex.'

This snapshot of violence supportive attitudes indicates societal resistance and backlash to the recognition of the gendered nature of violence against women by minimising, justifying and denying women's experiences of violence. These types of resistant attitudes also permeate some parts of the public and political conversation (Our Watch 2020a, p. 70). Further, the strongest predictor of violence-supportive attitudes is the degree to which respondents held sexist attitudes and other prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes such as those based on ethnicity, disability or sexuality. This highlights the often intersecting dynamics of sexism, racism, ableism and homophobia.

The *From Girls to Men* survey found that 43% of Australians held 'traditional' views on gender roles, encompassing negative views on women in leadership and conservative views about women in the workplace and home (Evans et al., 2018). Moderate views were held by 62% of Australians. This 'moderate' viewpoint is described as a rhetorical commitment to gender equality in the workplace and home but is accompanied with a concern about 'political correctness' and/or that gender equality has gone 'too far', constituting forms of resistance as discussed below. Views described as 'progressive' were exhibited by 68% of Australians, which aligns with the need for concerted gender equality policy in workplaces and broader society. These three types of attitudes are not mutually exclusive, with survey respondents demonstrating multiple viewpoints depending on their own range of opinions on gender politics and different issues. The report notes, however, that there is a convergence around the more moderate value system, indicating slow

progress on gender equality and ongoing strong resistance given the attitudinal contradictions that characterise this position (Evans et al., 2018, p. 12).

In a patriarchal society, those who benefit and derive privilege from the current hierarchies tend to be cis-normative white men who dominate political, economic and social decision-making and power structures. In this context, while resistance and backlash comes from men *and* women, it is most likely to come from those who benefit from the existing power structures and status quo and have something to lose in changing gender relations (Flood et al., 2018, p. 10).

Masculinities, male privilege and resistance and backlash

Men in focus identifies the challenges of backlash and resistance to specific work on masculinities, how it relates to male privilege and dominant forms of masculinities, and engaging men in prevention work (Our Watch 2019). A gender analysis of power is central to this research, and to understanding why and how resistance and backlash manifests predominantly from men and from within the structures and systems that privilege and benefit them.

As Agócs (1997, p. 922) states, in relation to institutionalised resistance, "the issue is fundamentally one of power: the power to enable or silence voice, and the power to accord legitimacy to some interpretations of experience and deny it to others". In other words, those in power across the socioecological model in Australia are mostly white men (and some women) who legitimise what counts as 'normal', valued and important.

Analysing masculinities is foundational to

explore *why* men resist primary prevention of violence against women approaches and gender equality efforts. This is particularly pertinent given that the *From Girls to Men* survey revealed that many Australian men feel 'forgotten' in the struggle for gender equality (Evans et al., 2018). Nearly half (42%) of male respondents to the survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "gender equality strategies in the workplace do not take men into account" with this being fairly consistent across age groups (Evans et al., 2018, pp. 27-28).

Similarly, the results of that survey indicate 41% of Australian men believe that political correctness gives women an unfair advantage in the workplace, with 54% of Australian men believing political correctness hinders their ability to speak freely about gender equality. This indicates a need for more effective engagement with men and boys, to bring them along on the journey of achieving gender equality and minimise the potential for resistance and backlash.

Masculinities (and femininities and gender) are multiple, adaptable, relational and contextual (Our Watch 2019, p. 30). They are not innate biological characteristics, but rather dynamic social constructions that shift over time and place. For example, dominant gender norms, practices and structures will differ across communities and geographical locations.

Masculinities are hierarchical and shaped by other power dynamics based on factors such as race, class, geographic location, sexuality and so on. This hierarchy privileges some groups of men over others, and produces negative impacts on men who experience racism, classism, homophobia, ableism and so forth. In her work, Connell (1987, 2005) theorised this hierarchy as 'hegemonic', 'subordinated'

and 'marginalised' masculinities. Hegemonic masculinities are conceptualised as the 'currently accepted' version of being a man in any given context that legitimises patriarchy and maintains male power and privilege over women. Hegemonic masculinities are often portrayed as 'natural' or 'innate' but are actually unachievable for the majority of men. Hence, they are a set of idealised values, stereotypes, norms and practices that are promoted by individual men who exemplify these ideals. For example, hegemonic masculinities may be displayed by high-profile or powerful men, including, for example, sports stars or Members of Parliament, meaning they are also upheld within —and policed by— our social, political and economic structures and institutions (Our Watch 2019, p. 24).

These 'hegemonic' or dominant forms of masculinities are (re)produced, promoted and practiced in institutions and other formal settings such as workplaces, schools and sport, as well as more informal settings, such as in relationships, families, and other social settings. This shapes gendered power relations across the socioecological model: where we live, work and play. Consequently, there are particular norms, attitudes and practices that men feel pressure to conform to and support. These include autonomy, dominance and control, aggression and toughness, risk-taking, stoicism and the suppression of emotion, hypersexuality and compulsory heterosexuality (Our Watch 2019, p. 45; see also Rainbow Health 2020). *Men in focus* illustrates how rigid attachment to these stereotypes impacts women *and men* negatively (Our Watch 2019).

Another study *'The Man Box'* is an example that clearly demonstrates the pressures men feel to adhere to stereotypical beliefs of masculinity and the negative impacts

and outcomes when they do. In Australia, social pressures around being a 'real man' impact the lives of most young men at a very young age, with two thirds of young men being told from a young age about what it means to behave as a 'real man'. Framed as inside and outside the man box, those inside it report the poorest outcomes on mental health, experiencing and/or perpetrating bullying, violence, perpetrating sexual harassment, alcohol use, and car accidents. Such beliefs have real consequences on young men themselves and those around them. Some alarming findings from the study include:

- 20% believe that men should use violence to get respect if necessary.

- 56% of men believe a 'real man' would never say no to sex.

- 43% believe a man should always have the final say about decisions in his relationship or marriage.

- 44% believe if a guy has a girlfriend or wife, he deserves to know where she is all the time.

- 35% believe that men should really be the ones to bring money home to provide for their families, not women.

As Flood notes, "one of the starkest findings in *The Man Box* study is that men with higher levels of conformity to traditional masculinity are far more likely to perpetrate violence, both against women and against other men. Those 'further' in the Man Box are much more likely to perpetrate violence, and much less likely to intervene in others' violence" (The Men's Project and Flood 2018, p. 49).

Taken together, this research indicates that a substantial minority of Australians, especially men, condone violence against women (excusing, justifying, trivialising, downplaying and shifting blame), support men's control of decision-making in public

and private life, and conform to rigid gender roles and stereotypical constructions of masculinity (e.g. control and dominance), thus sustaining the gendered drivers of violence against women. These "dominant forms and patterns of masculinity… can create and give legitimacy to an overall system of gender inequality and, at their most harmful, help drive violence against women" (Our Watch 2019, p. 44). The persistence of these kinds of attitudes and behaviours, and these dominant forms and constructions of masculinity helps explain why efforts to challenge these ideas about men's and women's roles or gender stereotypes and violence and power relations at individual, interpersonal and structural levels are often met with resistance.

Specifically, Flood (2019, p. 323) expresses the view that men's resistance to primary prevention efforts has roots in:

1. Men's attitudes and beliefs, believing that violence against women is a problem for a small minority of pathological men (see Highlight Box 2 & 4).

2. Men's identities and emotional investments in gender, where implications that they are complicit in women's subordination can instigate feelings of defensiveness and/or anger.

3. Men's habituated practices and relations in the world, and their participation in taken-for-granted or 'natural' practices of power and domination in in their relationships and families.

Such resistance, asserts Flood, can be based in ignorance and subconscious adherences to gender relations, where men's implication in violence against women can be a shocking realisation. On the other hand, men's resistance can also

be overtly political with conscious ideological commitments to anti-feminism, and direct involvement in perpetrating sexism and violence such as men's rights activists (see pages 44-48).

Dominant forms and patterns of masculinity uphold an overall system, which privileges some groups of men over others resulting in some men receiving much greater benefits than others (Our Watch 2019, p. 32; Elliot 2019). Although men as a group are privileged over women there is a hierarchy of men and masculinities, which means that different men have different access to power, privilege and resources. (Our Watch 2019, pp. 32, 34). As *Men in focus* describes, "cisgender heterosexual white men, men without disability, generally hold greater power and status than other men. In fact, men's privilege is often held at the expense of other men — for not being white, not being straight, or not being wealthy, and so on" (Our Watch 2019, p. 39). Hence, challenging such privilege can be seen as a threat and is often met with resistance and backlash.

Privilege can be defined as "systematically conferred advantages individuals enjoy by virtue of their membership in dominant groups with access to resources and institutional power that are beyond the common advantages of marginalised citizens" (Bailey 1998, p. 1098, cited in Flood and Pease 2005, p. 4). Membership of a particular group confers privilege onto an individual; it is a structural and societal conferral of privilege that individuals enjoy and often explicitly and implicitly maintain. In other words, the group an individual belongs to (by virtue of their gender, sexuality, class, or race for example) often determines the forms of privilege they experience, rather than their individual abilities (something important to remember in discussions around meritocracies for example).

Privilege is often invisible, where members are unaware of the difference in access to benefits, perceiving such access as normal and unlikely to then be able to acknowledge the experiences of marginalised groups: "By simply exercising their prerogatives in everyday life, they can easily ignore how others are denied the same opportunities" (Flood and Pease 2005, p. 5). Consequently, the normalisation of privilege and dominant norms it (re)produces become the standard for what is valued and devalued, considered superior and inferior, and shapes perceptions around positionings of self and other. For example, in relation to how occupations are gendered, Flood and Pease describe (2005, p. 6):

> *The normalisation of men's privilege is evident in the first instance in powerful gendered constructions of occupation. Various occupations are coded as intrinsically male: they are assumed to be held and practised by men, and deviations from this are marked as "other". For example, in everyday conversation one hears of "doctors", implicitly male, and "woman doctors", marked by their not being "[male] doctors". Constructions of appropriate occupational roles for men and women are embedded too in the cultures of workplaces themselves, thus sustaining gendered divisions of labour.*

This analysis of privilege helps us understand the dynamics of resistance and backlash. Members of privileged groups often do not recognise or understand what their privilege means or become angry and defensive when their privileged status is challenged or problematised. Further, there is an expectation that privilege brings happiness and fulfillment, and when this is

not the case, this absence is sometimes used to deny the existence of privilege, becoming a justification of (sometimes violent) resistance to change (such as individual men who may be economically disadvantaged compared to some women may decry their male privilege) (Flood and Pease 2005, pp. 5-6). Violence and aggression can even be a reaction to a decrease in privilege.

Peretz (2020, p. 448) asserts that the question around men's privilege is not whether men can see it, but "'[w]hat happens when men's own privilege becomes visible?' Do they cover up, ignore, or maintain their privilege… How do they respond to and navigate their own privilege made visible?" In this analysis of men's self-reflection of their privilege, "[e]ven once the "invisible knapsack" is made visible, privilege still exists, despite men's efforts to curtail it" (Peretz, 2020, p. 471). This, Peretz argues, lends strong support to focus on the institutional, structural and cultural dynamics that sustain privilege, rather than individual attributes only.

> *Privilege is "not merely an individual attribute, like a pair of shoes one can remove and discard: it is also built into the fabric of institutions and organizations"* (Messner 2011, p. 5).

Therefore, resistance can be anticipated from dominant groups who feel threatened by initiatives that are aimed at institutional, structural and cultural changes such as primary prevention of violence against women and broader gender equality projects. For example, thinking about how privileged groups may react to organisational diversity and inclusion initiatives, Plaut et al., (2020) identify

different and multiple types of threats dominant groups perceive related to their group status:

1. Prototypicality threats, the fear that one's subgroup will no longer be the quintessential representative in a field, organisation or institution.

2. Group status threat is perceiving that one's groups' societal status is in jeopardy due to diversity efforts.

3. Symbolic threats relate to perceived threats to one group's culture, values, and/or beliefs where in response to the inclusion of other groups culture/values/beliefs in a country, workplace, community etc., dominant group narratives of the social and political context may be challenged, causing resistance to those changes.

4. Perceived or 'realistic threats' to resources such as jobs, property, food and so on can catalyse intergroup conflict, prejudice, and stereotyping of non-dominant 'outgroups' where the advancement of marginalised groups due to initiatives such as affirmative action or quotas, may be perceived by dominant groups as threatening to their own job security, resources like pay, and opportunities.

5. Meritocratic threats, where there is a possibility that one's achievements are not based on personal merit, but rather privilege.

6. Perceived exclusion, where diversity efforts are seen as excluding a group, (e.g. workplace gender equality initiatives excluding men).

Building understanding of the different forms of 'threats' privileged groups may perceive can be helpful to develop the type of strategies needed to minimise and

respond to potential and actual resistance and backlash (Part 4 and 5). This is especially useful to think about in introducing violence prevention change initiatives in institutions, given that such change processes challenge the status quo in terms of formal and informal norms, practices and structures.

Men in focus highlights this with regards to men's experiences of 'gender role stress' when they feel that their masculinity is being challenged or is under threat, or when those who are invested in attaining ideals of dominant forms of masculinity feel stress in not being able to embody these (Our Watch 2019, p. 51). This can increase the likelihood of displaying sexist attitudes, aggression, sexual harassment and violence against women as ways to affirm masculinity.

For example, research by Dahl, Vesico and Weaver (2015) found that men who were outperformed by women in traditionally masculine areas responded with anger and behaved in ways that sexually objectified women. This corresponds with some of the forms of resistance observed in reaction to primary prevention of violence against women efforts that seek to challenge male privilege and question and change the norms and practices that are associated with dominant forms of masculinities.

Male privilege and dominant masculinities are intimately linked to how our institutions and systems are structured in patriarchal ways that privilege men, reinforced by and inextricably interwoven with gendered norms and practices. This privilege is reinforced and intersects with other structures including race,

heteronormativity, cisnormativity, ability and class.

For example, in Australia, the ongoing impacts of colonisation and entrenched racist social norms, attitudes and practices are embedded in social, political and economic structures (Our Watch 2018). Non-Indigenous, white men and women monopolise privilege, power and resources over Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people of colour.

Challenging structural inequalities that marginalise particular groups of men must be included to effectively address violence against women because the "hierarchy of men serves to maintain the status quo and to continue to privilege men as a group over women as group, while also conferring greater amounts of power and status to particular groups of men" (Our Watch 2019, p. 39).

Nevertheless, although some men receive less benefits than some women, dominant forms of masculinities and male privilege underpin many of Australia's structures and systems. As *Men in focus* summarises:

> [O]ur institutions and systems are structured in ways that privilege men over women. In our legal system, our political system, in the workplace and in the family, in sports organisations and community groups, men continue to hold the majority of power and influence. Conversely, women often face marginalisation within these social structures. Our laws have commonly policed and regulated women's bodies; in the workplace there is unequal pay; and in the family unit a division of labour persists where men occupy the public realm while women are

expected to take on the domestic and reproductive labour…Women receive lower pay, rarely hold the highest positions in our political and economic institutions, and their bodies are policed by our legal systems. In this way, structures oppress women in a real material sense…these structures also promote particular gender ideologies, a set of norms and practices that we associate with gender and believe to be natural and proper (Our Watch 2019 p. 40).

The material, social and political consequences of gender are very real for women, evidenced by the disproportionate violence women experience. Conversely, explicitly and implicitly supporting the patriarchal gendered structures, norms and practices that maintain men's oppositional benefits and privilege delivers real benefits to men. Understanding how masculinities and privilege drive and sustain resistance and backlash to maintain these structural dynamics is critical and fundamental to this work.

Gendered institutions and organisations

Change the story explicitly and repeatedly points to the importance of a focus on organisational and institutional change, because:

The gendered drivers arise from gender discriminatory institutional, social and economic structures, social and cultural norms, and organisational, community, family and relationship practices that together create environments in which women and men are not considered equal, and violence against women is tolerated and

even condoned.

In addition:

Violence against women is condoned both through widely-held beliefs and attitudes (social norms), and through legal, institutional and organisational structures and practices that reflect and reinforce them.

Institutions are the "formal and informal 'rules of the game'—profoundly shap[ing] political life" (Mackay 2011, p. 181). There are formal and informal institutions that are multiple and relational with gendered politics inherent in both. Gendered institution means that constructions of masculinity and femininity are fundamental to the daily culture and logic of institutions (Krook and Mackay, 2011, p. 6). In other words, masculinities and femininities underpin appropriate behaviour and what makes sense, where masculinities are valued over femininities, shaping advantage and disadvantage (Mackay, 2011).

Formal institutions are the explicit political, bureaucratic, legislative, policy and organisational architecture that structures societies. Organisations are a subset of formal institutions where institutional rules are played out, such as a particular workplace and/or setting like schools (Rao and Kelleher, 2003; Krook and Mackay, 2011). Informal institutions are the practices, discourses, and norms that shape formal institutions. They can contradict or undermine formal rules, where, for instance, the adoption of a law on gender equality can be undermined and resisted by the informal institutions (e.g., defence of privilege) where such a law is implemented (North 1990, p. 6 in Krook and Mackay, 2011, 11).

For example, Australia's public institutions

are made up of different institutional levels all with their own political, legal, bureaucratic, policy, economic and social dynamics and power relations. This includes being a member state in the international system, different Federal, state and territory governments and bureaucracies, and local governments and councils. Within all these levels there are different types of actors with different tasks, competencies and roles responsible for processes of change as well as norms and practices that sustain dominant informal institutions.

Another example would be an entire sector such as construction or healthcare. These sectors have different external and internal frameworks, policies and practices, that influence how an organisation functions in a number of formal and informal ways (workplace policies, rules and regulations, funding, and so on).

Understanding the relationship between formal and informal institutions is critical when analysing change processes where formal institutions can be frustrated, diluted and complicated by the informal institutions which seek to reassert traditional gender norms. In other words, the informal institutions resist and push back against that change, where often "informal rules in use may serve as a primary site of resistance" (Mackay 2011, p. 184; Chappell, 2011).

Change the story accounts for formal and informal institutions by highlighting the interrelated nature of gendered structures, norms and practices across the socioecological model. Therefore, individuals learn appropriate institutional behaviour where resistance is a marker for an institution's commitment to gender equality policies (Agócs 1997, p. 918; Lombardo and Mergeart 2013, p. 6).

Individuals make up institutions and the collective, but the collective and institution also shape individuals' perceptions of gender and gendered stereotypes. Institutions can resist change processes and strategies through the everyday norms and practices they sustain (Krook and Mackay, 2011). In responding to resistance, both top-down and bottom-up measures are necessary to account for the co-constitution of resistance and backlash.

Institutional and organisational resistance

Institutional resistance can be defined as patterns of action or inaction to change processes and initiatives that suggests collective resistance to change. These can be actions and structures that seek to halt or roll back realisation of gender equality, but also include inactions, absences and silences such as a commitment to a policy but inadequate human and financial resourcing, or leadership distancing themselves from the change process, as well as not recognising and taking into account the ways in which institutions and organisations are gendered in and of themselves (Agócs 1997; Mergeart and Lombardo 2014; Lombardo and Mergaert, 2013; Thomas and Plaut 2008). Institutionalised resistance is difficult to 'see' and has become increasingly sophisticated due to the unacceptability of *openly* challenging the norms of gender equality in neoliberal democracies such as Australia (Smolović, Jones et al., 2020).

As Agócs (1997, p. 918) argues:

> To say that resistance is institutionalized means that it is embedded in and expressed through organizational structures and processes of legitimation, decision-making and resource

allocation. Institutionalized resistance may be embodied in decisions to provide or withhold resources, to adopt a new policy or change an established one, or to implement or refuse to implement a policy. Such decisions presuppose the power to command organizational resources, including information and employees' time, the authority to act or to choose not to act, and the power to legitimate or to silence the voices of those who advocate for change… power holders can and do use their control over resources and authority to resist change when they perceive it as threatening.

Such patterns of resistance collectively point to the multi-layered and complex nature and movement between the structural, institutional, organisational and individual levels and sites of power and decision-making.

If we look at individual, organisational, and structural levels, structures are made up of organisations which are made up of individuals. Resistance depends on what mode a person is acting. Organisations can put in place policies and so on, but what I see and have experienced, is you have an individual who uses denial or backlash but when they're in their role such as chairing a meeting or writing something for example, they will shift to appeasement. They will pick up and drop different types of resistance depending on who is in the audience. They decide what is more safe and make a strategic choice. I can't speak to how conscious or not that is, but … privately at work for example, they might say to me 'why are we even talking about this, what's this got to do with anything?' but then in a more public setting as an organisational representative they'll say "oh of course we need to do this". So, there's a strategic use of the different types of resistance in different settings and levels. You might have an organisation that … everything on the organisational level [is promising] but then you get down to the actual doing and then it's appeasement, and then down to the individual in a more private [conversation] and then it's straight up denial or backlash.[5]

[5] Stakeholder 2, 2021.

Drivers of resistance

Primary prevention of violence against women explicitly challenges existing gendered patterns of privilege and power and confronts male advantages. Resistance is often rooted in fear and anxiety to these changes: uncertainties of the future, the relinquishment of familiarity and comfortability of the status quo, and frustration due to the lack of control an individual may feel (Thomas and Plaut 2008, p. 3).

Primary prevention of violence against women challenges individuals' personal identities and beliefs and encourages individuals to be critical of gender roles. As discussed throughout this report, many people who believe in the prevention of violence, do not want to reflect on their own roles in sustaining the gendered drivers of violence. Consequently, resistance can stem from the feeling of a lack of understanding about what gender *is* and how it influences men's disproportionate perpetration of violence and women's overall vulnerability to violence.

There may also be an unwillingness or hesitancy to recognise how gender shapes individual and collective lives and relationships. Most people want to believe that they are good people who have control over their own lives, rather than their lives being shaped by implicit and explicit power dynamics such as gender.

More overtly, resistance and backlash can also be driven by strict adherence to stereotyped constructions of masculinities and femininities and strong attachment to patriarchal gender relations that drive violence. This includes claims that feminist social movements have victimised men, such as those made by men's and fathers' rights activists and incels (see 44-48).

Within institutions and organisations, individual and collective resistance may be driven by insecurities around how primary prevention of violence against women will impact people's jobs, their social and professional relationships, changing organisational behaviour and practices that are no longer acceptable, and other organisational related factors. Resistance can come from a loss of face, where people associated with the previous status quo in an organisation become defensive of what was once accepted that they are unwilling to change. In other words, when change challenges conformity and comfortability with a certain status quo, this can produce resistance.

For example, 'locker room talk' or sexist jokes that were once condoned and even promoted, elicit disapproval and potentially professional and personal sanctions. This may drive people to form even more rigid attachments to harmful norms and practices that contravene changes to establish a new but often fragile status quo that actively challenges the gendered drivers of violence.

Changes to the existing status of privileged groups or the accepted way of doing things can threaten perceptions around individual status in gender hierarchies. Raising and discussing gender as a concept can provoke discomfort, fear and/or hostility, particularly in male dominated settings, where certain forms of masculinities (e.g., objectivity, rationality, logic) and men's priorities are valued. For example, staff in male dominated sectors may reject processes that are put in place to encourage more diversity in an organisation by targeted recruitment initiatives to bring more women and marginalised groups into an organisation and fast track them into decision-making positions.

Women and other marginalised groups may feel unworthy or be perceived by others as undeserving of getting into such decision-making positions due to targets or affirmative action processes. As shown in Part 3, this fails to take into account how leadership and merit are gendered in and of themselves.

Resistance to primary prevention of violence against women initiatives and programs can come from a range of communities and individuals: from those who may be unaware of how gender drives violence against women, through to people who actively and aggressively oppose gendered approaches to prevention of violence. Thinking about the different levels of where someone may resist is important: in their homes, among friends, in the workplace, in sporting teams or community events, online and so on. Identifying key gatekeepers who have formal and informal spheres of influence can also assist in designing effective approaches.

There are a number of settings in which primary prevention initiatives are currently being implemented and we can think about who the key decision-makers are and the targeted audience to be able to understand who might resist and why. This includes individuals who make up institutions and organisations as well as external stakeholders who may resist and influence the success of primary prevention efforts.

The below list is not exhaustive nor do all of these individuals and communities resist in practice, many can be and are supporters of primary prevention. However, it can help to think about who may resist considering the range of individuals and communities that can control the adoption, implementation and framing of primary prevention of violence against women.

People and groups who may resist the

following lines of prevention activities include:

- *Primary prevention advocacy and activism* – individual Members of Parliament, political parties, public servants, policymakers, community leaders and groups, religious/faith leaders and groups, businesses and the private sector, media networks, academics, think tanks and influential individuals.

- *Respectful relationships education* – parents, school principals, teachers, students, education policymakers and education curriculum.

- *Workplace prevention or gender equality approaches* – organisational leaders such as CEOs and Board members, human resource staff who gatekeep certain policies or entitlements, managers, informal workplace leaders and culture, individual staff members.

- *Primary prevention media campaigns* – community members, men's rights activists, online trolls, traditional and social media outlets.

- *Universities, TAFEs and tertiary education settings*— leaders such as Chancellors or Faculty Deans, research funding bodies, department heads, staff, students and curriculum.

- *National media engagement*— media outlets, editors, journalists, readers.

- *Sport and recreation*— fans, sports players, coaches, sponsors, media networks.

Anyone who advocates for a feminist inspired gendered approach to preventing violence against women can and often does experience a range of forms of resistance. This includes resistance to work undertaken by (for example) feminist and

prevention of violence against women organisations, activists, practitioners, policymakers, academics and researchers, authors, journalists and male allies.

Resistance can be amplified, sometimes dangerously so, when feminism and anti-sexism work intersects with the work of other movements, such as those seeking justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, or pursuing anti-racism or anti-homophobia agendas for example. Those working at the intersection of such work may be more likely to encounter severe, aggressive or violent forms of backlash, or to encounter resistance and backlash more frequently. This occurs in a range of settings in people's public and private lives.

Resistant behaviours can include uninterested body language or an eye roll in a training. It can manifest in certain types of talking points and discourses as well as how issues are framed, such as media reporting on violence against women or how local, state and federal governments and leaders discuss violence against women. It can also consist of extreme manifestations such as individual and collectively coordinated threats of and perpetration of gendered violence, including on online forums and on social media.

As discussed in Part 3 of this report, resistance to gendered approaches to preventing violence can take many different forms and consists of multiple and sometimes simultaneous types of actions. It is a personal and multilayered phenomenon that is underpinned by gender norms, practices and structures that drive violence against women. To grasp this complexity, further nuance is necessary to capture the breadth of the different forms that resistance can take. Part 3 unpacks these forms further.

Part 3 - Forms of resistance and backlash

Resistance and backlash to primary prevention approaches to preventing violence against women takes many different forms that can be difficult to see in some cases, and obvious in others. To understand the many ways in which resistance and backlash to the prevention of violence against women manifest, Flood, Dragiewicz and Pease (2018, 2020) offer an 8-part typology (Figure 2) comprised of: denial, disavowal, inaction, appeasement, appropriation, co-option, repression and backlash.[6]

These different forms range from refusing to acknowledge the problem of gender inequality through to the most hostile forms of anti-feminist backlash, including actual and/or threat of physical and sexual violence. To achieve violence prevention goals, it is important to address all these forms as they are overlapping, not neatly separated.

The explanations and examples given below often have elements of more than one of the different forms of resistance and backlash. Nevertheless, the typology developed by Flood et al., (2018) provides a useful conceptual tool to analyse and better understand active and passive forms of resistance, with the potential to inform more effective responses to it.
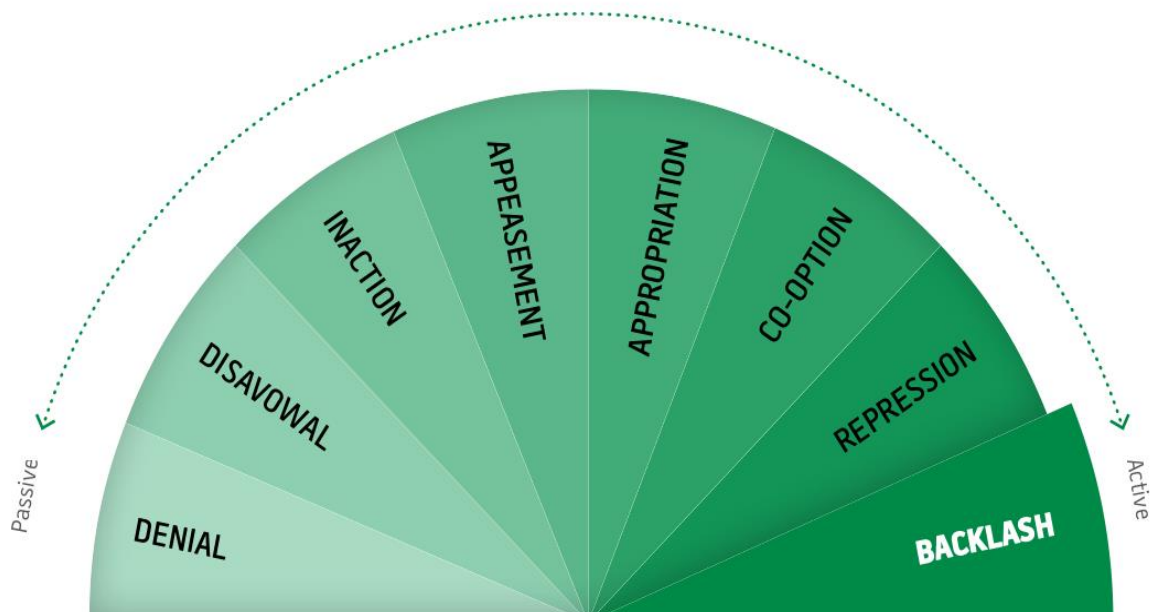
Figure 2: Forms of Resistance (Vic Health, 2018)

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[6] Other frameworks have been developed to analyse resistance and backlash, especially within organisations and workplaces (Colley, Williamson and Foley 2021; Mergeart and Lomardo 2014; Lombardo and Mergeart 2013; Thomas and Plaut 2008).

However, given the uptake and dissemination of this typology among prevention of violence against women stakeholders, this report uses the typology offered by Flood et al. (2018).

Understanding, monitoring and responding to resistance and backlash

Denial

Denial of the gendered drivers of violence and what constitutes violence against women is considerable (Our Watch 2020, p. 239). Denial as a form of resistance is not always hostile but involves denying "the problem or the legitimacy of the case for change" (Flood et al., 2018). Denial —in this case primary prevention of violence against women— perpetuates the first gendered driver of condoning violence against women by *justifying* the acceptability of violence against women, *excusing* violent behaviour and structures, *trivialising* the impact of violence as not sufficiently serious enough to warrant action, *downplaying* the seriousness of violent behaviours and *shifting blame* from the perpetrator to the victim (Our Watch 2021, pp. 37-39). Indeed, the NCAS survey found that the strongest influences on attitudes towards violence against women were 'denying gender inequality is a problem' and 'promoting rigid gender roles'.

There are several overlapping elements of denial that can help us recognise and understand it in more nuanced ways across the socioecological model (Agócs 1997; Flood et al., 2018, p. 13). These can be understood as follows:

- ***Denying the problem (violence against women) exists including minimising its extent, significance or impact and/or renaming and redefining the problem out of existence.***

As one stakeholder said in an interview, "everyone wants to save someone from family violence, but nobody wants to give women the rights that men have got, actually nobody understands that women don't have those rights, they don't have a

lot of the aspects that men have in this world, the privilege really of what they have as a group".[7]

Research indicates that the majority of people tend to have less of an issue with recognising the issue of family violence and the need to prevent it. However, people are far more likely to be resistant to the idea that they are part of the story of violence against women, and that they may contribute to the drivers of this violence in subtle and subconscious ways in their relationships, homes, workplaces, social groups, and communities, because of the structures, norms and practices of gender inequality. Few people, especially those who consider themselves to be non-violent or who have never been physically violent towards a person, want to recognise their complicity in the gendered drivers of violence. As a prevention officer working in a vocational education setting describes:

> *Bringing family violence prevention into [vocational education settings] was a little bit of a shock, people don't understand what primary prevention means. I think when they hear the word family violence, they literally refer to family violence in the actual response side of it, more so than prevention. It was really interesting coming into that space, introducing primary prevention and then explaining to everyone that it was really focused on gender equality. I think that threw a lot of people back, like "hold on that's not family violence, what are you talking about". To go into certain areas was quite difficult. Everybody is "please come into our department, [capacity-building on]*

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[7] Stakeholder 4, 2021.

family violence sounds amazing, I want my staff to know about this" [but when] we talk about the drivers and gender equality, all of a sudden you get these looks.[8]

This example echoes the common response to primary prevention efforts that sees people claim that gender inequality has nothing to do with violence against women, because they believe it is about individual perpetrators' mental health or alcohol consumption or socioeconomic status. Although these factors can play a role in reinforcing violence against women, they are not the underlying drivers of or causal explanation for this violence (Our Watch, 2021). This common form of denial renames and redefines the drivers of violence as an individual issue, thus refusing to acknowledge any systemic and societal responsibility to address violence against women.

At an institutional and organisational level, denial can manifest as 'gender blindness', referring to when organisations ignore gender by operating from unstated masculine norms that conceal male privilege. There is no recognition of the difference in men and women's experiences or the need for different policies to respond to different experiences based on gender.

This includes policies and practices that promote equitable caring responsibilities that take into account women's disproportionate unpaid, reproductive labour burdens. Often this is framed in terms of women's individual choices (e.g. to have a baby) rather than gender norms, practices and structures that shape women's personal and professional lives. For example, the design of policies around parental leave often disincentivise men

from being primary carers where women continue to constitute 95% of primary carers, having huge impact on women's economic opportunities and labour force participation rates (Baird, Hamilton and Constantin 2021, pp. 8-9).

When institutional and organisational policies fail to take these gender dynamics into account, it supports male dominance and privilege in organisations and institutions. This privilege remains embedded through institutional practices, policies and cultures where the gendered institution is seen as natural, a given, and taken for granted, blind to the gendered structures, norms and practices that sustain gender inequalities (Colley et al., 2020, p. 4; see pages 39-43).

- ***Blaming victims for violence perpetrated against them***

This is a common response and is one of the ways violence against women is condoned (Flood et al., 2018, p. 13). The National Community Attitudes Survey indicates that one in eight Australians believe that if a woman is raped while she is affected by drugs or alcohol, she is at least partly responsible. One in ten Australians believe that domestic violence can be excused if a woman is affected by alcohol and one in three Australians believe that if a woman doesn't leave her abusive partner, then she is responsible for violence continuing. A third of Australians believe if a woman sends a nude image to her partner, she is partly responsible if he shares it without her permission (Webster et al., 2017). What these numbers demonstrates is the extent of attitudes that continue to blame women for violence they experience.

Rather than focusing on challenging the

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[8] Stakeholder 4, 2021.

gendered drivers of violence, victim-blaming shifts responsibility onto victim survivors for the violence and harassment they experience. Examples of victim-blaming include, for example:

- Not calling out men's violent behaviour, rather arguing that 'women shouldn't dress so provocatively' or 'women should not walk at night alone, especially not with headphones in.'
- Tips for women's safety to avoid being raped, such as #SafetyTipsForWomen on Twitter.
- Sharing self-defence tips that place the focus on self-policing (usually) women's bodies, space and behaviours.
- Advice 'for women' to not fall 'prey' to sexual predators, ranging from women's consumption of alcohol, to being out at night-time, to not being attractive (Rentschler 2015).

These attitudes can be espoused in both private and public discourses and rhetoric around sexual assault allegations (Maley 2021.

Victim-blaming is amplified for women who also experience other forms of oppression and discrimination. For example, media reporting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who are victims of gendered violence often invokes racialised stereotypes, such as alcohol or drug use. As *Changing the picture* notes, this trivialises the violence towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women as less serious or worthy of attention (Our Watch 2018).

Violence against sex workers, a highly stigmatised and discriminated against community, is often excused due to the perceived risks of and stigma attached to sex work (Smith 2013; Stardust 2017). As Smith (2013) writes, "This stigma feeds into understandings of women that are violence-supporting and referring to victims of violence as "prostitutes" continues to "other" these women and locates them as somehow deserving: she knew the danger". These types of attitudes dehumanise sex workers and excuse violence perpetrated against them.

On legislative and judicial institutional levels, shifting blame onto victims is built into certain practices and processes, such as allowing women's sexual history to be presented in rape trials and conveying that a woman's behaviour is relevant to acts of violence perpetrated against her (Our Watch 2021, pp. 37-38). In broader societal discourses, in an analysis of Australian media reporting, the authors found that 16% of analysed news items about sexual assault inferred that women were partly responsible by placing themselves at risk by drinking, "flirting" or going home with the perpetrator (Sutherland et al., 2016, p. 24).

This analysis found that often, media coverage excused violent behaviour in descriptions about the incident and in descriptions about male perpetrators and their character, such as they were "friendly", a "hard-worker" or "good guy" and violence was "out of character" (Sutherland et al., 2016, p. 27; see Highlight Box 2). The authors also found that perpetrators were generally invisible in reporting of violence against women.

Close to 60% of news items that were about, or referred to, incidents of violence included no information about perpetrators. Violence against women is committed by another person, usually by a man, usually by a man that a woman knows, yet it is frequently reported as

though that other person – boyfriend, husband, partner – does not exist (Sutherland et al., 2016, p. 32).

- ***Denying the credibility of the message on the basis that it is supposedly irrational, untruthful, or exaggerated.***

Violence against women in Australian society is normalised, with many Australians holding attitudes that suggest sexual aggression is part of a man's sex drive, a normal reaction to a man's stress or anger, and a normal gender dynamic in a relationship. Two in five Australians believe that women make up false reports of sexual assault to punish men, and a similar number believe that women going through custody cases make up or exaggerate claims of domestic violence in order to improve their chances (Webster et al., 2018).

Two in five Australians believe many women exaggerate how unequally women are treated in Australia (Webster et al., 2018).

The individualisation of violence or the focus on other factors (e.g. alcohol, mental health) as influencing a perpetrator's act of violence is often highlighted, downplaying and excusing the violence itself (on the flipside, if a woman is affected by alcohol, drugs or seen as 'sexually promiscuous', she is seen to be partly or wholly responsible). Moreover, there is an emphasis on physical and sexual violence compared to other forms of non-physical violence and coercion (Sutherland et al., 2016).

There is often a degree of disbelief and misunderstanding around what constitutes violence. For example, in a survey conducted across five local government councils in Victoria, 9% of respondents did not consider behaviours outlined in the Victorian *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic) to be sexual harassment, including criminal offences such as sexual assault, and 13% said they considered some behaviours, but not all, to be sexual harassment (Victorian Auditor-General's Office [VAGO] 2020, p. 8).

This type of denial can be institutionalised when it is expressed through the power of authorities by conferring legitimacy on some interpretations of experience and denying it to others (Agócs 19097, p. 923). For example, this can be displayed through a 'he said, she said' mentality and approach around sexual harassment and gendered violence. Power and legitimisation exercised in such ways helps establish, change, and enforce rules that contribute to the 'making sense' of an institution and organisation. These rules are embedded in institutional and organisational structures and cultures, including "what counts as knowledge, fact and truth and what is to be considered trivial or dismissed as hyperbole, fabrication, exaggerated or unsubstantiated claim" (Agócs 1997, p. 923). Research indicates that gender and prevention advocates express the view that evidence they present can be dismissed, experiences of violence and harassment can be framed as subjective and exaggerated, and statistics on rates of violence against women frequently questioned (Agocs 1997, p 922). For example, one practitioner working in men's violence against women training and education, described when he was presenting statistics on the rates of family violence in a session, a participant who was a doctor, stated "I don't believe the statistics. If these stats are real, why aren't

I seeing these women come into my hospital?" (Flood et al., 2021, p. 8).

- ***Denying the legitimacy of the issue by attacking the credibility of the messengers of change by impugning on their motives and marginalising them as a special interest group.***

This consists of personal attacks on change advocates, activists and movements more broadly, used to stigmatise individuals or groups as 'trouble makers.' For example, framing the gendered drivers of violence as 'extreme' portrays those who advocate for them as radicals who are being over the top and 'too sensitive' (see pages 43-44).

- ***Reversing the problem, adopting a victim position, claiming reverse discrimination.***

As Agócs (1997, p. 925) argues, members of dominant groups can resist change initiatives and processes by claiming that these are personal attacks on them, rather than attempts to address systemic and structural issues. This portrays individuals, movements, laws, policies and so on that are seeking change as perpetrators of unfairness, self-interested and vindictive, while those in power are framed as victims and helpless individuals (see pages 39-43).

As an example, in response to the campaign *Doing Nothing Does Harm,* one Facebook commenter stated "Shouldn't the title be showing disrespect to men and women. No of course not, men are the over scrutinised, under valued and most poorly treated people in society these days. Women win the World a long time ago and us men are still getting bashed constantly". Similarly, there is a tendency to acknowledge women's experiences of sexual harassment while simultaneously displaying sympathy for perpetrators and the impacts on his career or life, where sexually harassing and discriminatory behaviours in organisations are often symptoms of the broader institutionalisation of condoning of violence against women.

In summary, denial of the problem of violence against women ranges from discrediting and undercutting women's experiences and dismissing and downplaying the extent of violence against women. It is pervasive and exhibited by a range of individuals, organisations and institutions.

Disavowal

Disavowal, which overlaps with denial, is the refusal to support or accept responsibility for dealing with endemic nature of violence against women (Flood et al., 2018). Common practices of disavowal include phrases like "It is not my problem", "I'm not responsible as I didn't create it" or "it's up to others (individuals, women, victims) to fix it". In a survey conducted for the Sexual Harassment in Local Government report (Victorian Auditor-General's Office [VAGO] 2020, p.44), looking at five Victorian councils, one respondent stated, "only ladies should be worried about sexual harassment…Ladies should behave themselves [with] propriety to avoid sexual harassment" (VAGO 2020, p. 44).

Similar to denial in the form of victim blaming, it places the onus of change on those marginalised groups who experience disproportionate levels of gendered and intersectional forms of violence. This is despite the relative lack of power and access to decision-making that these groups enjoy, compared to cis-normative heterosexual white men that overwhelmingly benefit from patriarchal

social, political and economic structures, as discussed on pages 12-17.

Disavowal is not recognising that gender inequality is a structural and systemic problem. When gender is downplayed or completely disavowed based on an individual's personal life or attitudes, because a woman may "have never detected a gender problem" or "haven't ever experienced actual sexism", the structural elements of gender and other inequalities are decoupled from personal experiences (Gill, Kelan and Scharff, 2017, p. 234).

As shown by Gill, Kelan and Scharff (2017, p. 241), this produces a paradox where despite continuing gender inequalities in organisations such as workplaces characterised by pay, status and career opportunities, gender is frequently excused as a relevant factor. Inequalities are acknowledged or historicised, but the need for current and structural change is disavowed (Gill et al., 2017, p. 234).

#HowIWillChange I won't because like most men I don't harass women and we don't live in a rape culture. Women stop manufacturing oppression

#HowIWillChange I will not. This "culture" that women have created doesn't exist. It's fake. Catcalling isn't rape

#HowIWillChange I will not. You people whine too much. There isn't a rape culture. It doesn't exist.

- Petty et al., 2018

Another example of disavowal can be seen in responses to the #HowIWillChange hashtag that emerged in response to #MeToo. Launched by an Australian journalist, Benjamin Law, the hashtag prompted individuals to think about how

they can change in response to endemic sexual harassment and rape culture, one that supports or excuses sexual assault. Through a sample of 3,182 original tweets, the authors used content analysis to systematically identify prominent themes in the Twitter data (Petty et al., 2018). One theme was indignant resistance to social change meaning the users did not deny that sexual assault occurred, or that women face mistreatment in society, but they emphasised that they should not be held responsible or be called to take action for violence or disrespect which they do not believe they have committed.

This manifested in several subthemes, including #NotAllMen (See Highlight Box 3) as well as benevolent sexist attitudes which reinforced patriarchal ideals in the form of the 'protection' of women as the antidote to sexual assault. Users who appeared to identify as women supported this narrative as well, specifically "not all men". Overall, users were indignant that they were asked to account for the ways in which they are complicit in the gendered drivers of violence against women.

Petty et al., suggest (2018, p. 2) such attitudes rely on women to convince men to change: those who are more likely to experience discrimination and oppression —which in the context of rape culture is women— are expected to be able to influence those who are privileged (men) in this dynamic. This points to the need for and responsibility of men to engage in the change process, to challenge dominant forms of masculinities that contribute to the drivers of violence against women as well as other forms of family violence, and to challenge the gendered norms, practices and structures that sustain these.

Disavowal is also used as an excuse to avoid responsibility for participating in change. One practitioner implementing a

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pilot program on primary prevention education in the Vocational Educational and Training setting described the resistance she faced with regards to the gendered drivers of violence. The department which represented a male-dominated sector in terms of students, educators and in practice, was supportive of addressing family violence; however, during the training, the participants became resistant to the explanations of the gendered drivers of violence. As the practitioner describes:

I've got to say after the workshop I received really negative feedback and that was the only all male group we ran which I found very interesting…I found it weird because that Department has been one of the biggest supporters I've had since I started this pilot. I think it's the 'I want to help change the world but the way you're telling me that we need to change it is … you know, people don't necessarily believe in it, and I suppose [don't] understand it'. I only found out through their manager, [the participants] didn't fill out any of the evaluation forms. He said 'look I want to give you feedback that I'm getting off my workers [who attended the training]'. He said they felt it was unfair and the way it was put across really put the audience off. There was one of the managers whose daughter had actually [experienced] a domestic violence situation with their partner, and he thought I really need to support this. He still [thought] the way that the gendered drivers were put across … was very off putting for men… I asked him to get them to fill out feedback forms and they wouldn't.

They actually just said look we don't want to, we don't feel comfortable doing it. They said they didn't feel comfortable [during] that workshop either.[9]

Disavowal can be especially useful to explore as a form of institutional resistance, which often takes the form of 'passing the buck' onto other institutions or policy frameworks. For example, organisational responses based on the claim that 'gender equality is a government or legislative responsibility, not ours.'

While it is often assumed that male dominated institutions are the most resistant, this fails to take into account the dynamics of decision-making and composition of leadership within female-dominated institutions. For example, education in Australia is a female dominated sector where 81.9% of primary school teachers and 61.1% secondary school teachers are female (ABS 2021).

Although female leadership in schools is increasing and the education sector shows promising signs of progress towards gender equality, men continue to disproportionately dominate leadership positions compared to women, comprising 60 per cent of school principals (McGrath 2020; Our Watch 2021a, p.13).

Organisational cultures are unique but are still informed by gender stereotypes and constructions of masculinity (including ideas about who makes a good leader) and femininity (including ideas about who should take up caring responsibilities). As in any setting and workplace, female and LGBTIQ teachers can experience violence from colleagues but also students, parents, and wider community members (Our Watch 2021a; Australian Human Rights

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[9] Stakeholder 4, 2021, Melbourne.

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Commission [AHRC] 2020). One practitioner found that in their work with schools, there is a prevailing attitude that if the violence isn't perpetrated by a colleague, female teachers have to "put up with it".

The example given was of a female teacher being harassed by male students (15/16 years old), who were physically intimidating her in a school playground. When the teacher told the principal she was told "she can't handle the students" rather than the students being reprimanded for their behaviour.[10] The principal is disavowing organisational (the school's) responsibility to prevent and respond to such behaviour. Despite the education sector being female dominated, this does not necessarily result in reduced levels of gendered violence or increased understanding of gender. Rather, it is a systemic issue of *who* are in positions of power that can decide on institutional responsibility and change to address the gendered drivers of violence against women.

Therefore, disavowal can consist of individual and institutional apathy towards gendered violence, not seeing their role to play in prevention. It can be the dismissal of personal and institutional responsibility to self-reflect on the gendered drivers of violence, and reduce violence against women to individual actions, and therefore responsibilities, only.

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[10] Stakeholder 3, 2021.

Highlight Box 1: Not all men

Many men and women see violence against women perpetrated by a minority of 'deviant' men affected by other reinforcing factors such as alcohol, poor mental health and drug abuse/use. It is a "rallying" cry that sees gendered approaches to understanding violence against women as unfairly targeting men (Flood 2019, p. 289).

The 'not all men' argument is underpinned by a 'good men versus bad men' narrative, that does not acknowledge the structural and cultural forces of masculinities and gender inequality that drive violence against women (Our Watch, 2019, p. 80). The dichotomy ignores the patriarchal system which privileges men as a group and is embedded in our political, economic and social structures and systems (and intersects with other structural privileges and inequalities). It rescinds responsibility of 'good' or 'real' men to address their complicity in gender inequality and violence against women, reinforcing benevolent sexism and patriarchal perceptions around the protection of women from 'bad men' (Salter, 2016a). By designating violence to a minority group of deviant individuals or groups of 'bad men,' who are often racialised and classed, this ignores everyday sexism and violence where the problem of violence against women, and therefore prevention efforts, only belong to some violent men in which violence is innate and can't be helped (Our Watch 2019, p. 80).

*#HowIWillChange by doing nothing. Men as a group aren't responsible for the actions of an individual. F*** everyone promoting this tag.*

Men, if you haven't sexually assaulted anyone (like most men), then you do not need to change #HowIWillChange (Petty et al., 2018)

As *Men in focus* observes "[t]he 'not all men' argument attempts to exempt the majority of men from responsibility and ignores how men are complicit in an overall system that supports…sexism and violence" (Our Watch 2019, p. 81). Passively not using violence is different to actively challenging the dominant forms of violence that can contribute to violence against women (Our Watch, 2019, p. 82; Pease, 2008, 2016). As feminist theories on masculinities illustrate (e.g., Connell 2005) and *Men in focus* (Our Watch 2019, pp. 81-82) details, men are complicit in maintaining unequal gender systems, even if they see themselves as a 'one of the good guys' and hold egalitarian views. This is known as the patriarchal dividend, "the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women" (Connell 2005, p. 79). Although the patriarchal dividend is distributed unevenly among men depending on the intersecting forms of inequality they may experience, the support of dominant/hegemonic forms of masculinity, unwillingness to challenge those dominant forms, and defending privilege and power maintains gender hierarchies (Our Watch 2019, p. 81; see pages 12-17). These norms, practices and structures of masculinities means that all men are implicated in the gendered system that drives violence against women (Our Watch 2019). Challenging 'not all men' arguments and attitudes mean rejecting the 'good men vs. bad men' dichotomy and recognising all men's complicity and advantage due to male privilege (see pages 12-17).

Inaction

Inaction as a form of resistance is relatively straightforward. It is the refusal or failure to implement measures to make progress towards the goal of gender equality, by delaying or blocking action. Individuals trying to institutionalise gender equality are often "swimming against the tide of the institutional inertia that maintains unequal gender norms" (Mergaert and Lombardo 2014, p. 8). Inaction can take the form of passive resistance, for example simply not acting on a change process by sitting on approvals, or active resistance; blocking action by explicitly refusing to implement gender equality or prevention initiatives, conveying the message that they are a low priority and not a necessity or it is 'not the right time', or constantly putting off action until there are 'more resources'.

There are a range of examples of both inaction at an individual, organisational and institutional level. For example, at an individual level this may involve leaders or key gatekeepers refusing to discuss or address prevention of violence against women. At an institutional level, this may include unwillingness to invest in or allocate appropriate resources to support gender equality initiatives.

Limited resources (financial and human) are a major barrier to change in many contexts, but the refusal to *allocate* resources, or to prioritise prevention work for resourcing over other demands is also a form of resistance to working towards the goal of gender equality (FESTA 2016). For example, in a survey conducted by Our Watch in January 2020 with over 300 stakeholders working in prevention of violence against women across Australia, almost a quarter of respondents work for

an organisation that provides critical violence-related services that they are not funded to deliver.

Now that bar is deliberately high, we get a lot of people saying, 'we acknowledge the issue, but we can't it's too expensive'. These are sometimes organisations with very large budgets saying it's too expensive to do and or it's not a priority or we've already done something similar, we've already got a policy around inclusion and we've got lots of gay people on staff so we get people kind of saying we can't do it yet we can't do it yet (Stakeholder 1, 2021)

Institutional inaction can also include noncompliance with certain laws, rules and regulations. For example, this is evident in the context of reporting of gender pay gaps that is mandated under the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* (Cth) for private companies with over 100 employees. In April 2021, there were 126 companies listed as not being compliant.[11]

This is a form of institutional apathy towards legal obligations designed to contribute towards achieving gender equality.

In summary, inaction is the deferring, delaying or blocking action towards primary prevention goals. Sometimes inaction can be a result of normal delays or workloads and not a conscious or intentional de-prioritising of this work. Addressing this kind of inaction can be relatively straightforward. However, inaction can also be more wilful; reflecting a lack of commitment to change, which results in action being deliberately de-prioritised or delayed. This can be exhibited by

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[11] See Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA), Non-compliant organisations list, 16th April 2021,

https://www.wgea.gov.au/what-we-do/compliance-reporting/non-compliant-list.

individuals, especially decision-makers who actively or passively oppose primary prevention efforts by not prioritising action, as well as organisations and institutions.

Appeasement

Appeasement is a tactic used to placate those advocating for change while simultaneously putting off or limiting any meaningful action to achieve change.

For example, when women's safety is framed in terms of men's protection of women and the maintenance of gender roles, this reinforces patriarchal ideals and benevolent sexist attitudes that men must maintain power and control; this 'protection' of women is portrayed as the solution to sexual assault rather than women's autonomy, agency and safety (Petty et al., 2018; Salter 2016a). Framing empathy and understanding of women's experiences of violence then is couched in appeals to men to 'man up' or be 'good men', mobilising hegemonic masculine ideals of strength and protectiveness that can reinforce stereotypical constructions of masculinities and femininities (gender driver 3) (Salter 2016a).

#HowIWillChange I WON'T! I will continue being the great husband, humble father, and strong head of the home that I am

I will help end the abuse of women by returning them to the domestic sphere where they have flowered [. . .]

(Petty et al., 2018, p. 6)

Institutional appeasement may occur when gender equality is seen to have already been achieved, where initiatives are no longer believed to be needed, and gender equality is seen as 'done' (Colley et al., 2020, pp. 4-5). Appeasement can also be phrased as "we tried to implement diversity initiatives, but staff were sick of them" (Flood et al., 2018, p. 16). This relates to the sustainability of primary prevention change processes and a lack of integration into the day-to-day functions of an organisation.

Those working on gender equality can begin to feel tired and/or hopeless when they do not see any visible changes or slow improvement resulting in a lack of excitement and overall apathy towards primary prevention (FESTA 2016). Fatigue with change initiatives such as primary prevention of violence against women can be used as an excuse to limit their impact (Colley et al., 2020). Changing people's attitudes and beliefs, or getting people to recognise the ways in which gender shapes our society, may seem like an uphill battle for changemakers where barriers to being able to access the necessary power, resources and tools for primary prevention may seem insurmountable.

Appeasement is also made through claims around 'post-feminism'. This is where feminist activism and goals are seen to be no longer required due to the perceived institutionalisation and professionalisation of feminism and the achievement of gender equality through numerical parity and legal frameworks (Gill et al., 2016; Flood et al. 2018, p. 10). For example, 'why do we need gender equality when feminism has already been achieved, women are in parliament, we even had a female PM!' or 'gender equality is no longer needed, there are lots of women working in my office.' This type of excuse problematically individualises gender equality and fails to capture the structural and intersecting forms of privilege and oppression (e.g., *how* institutions are gendered, *which* women are working in the office and are in decision-making positions and *what* their experiences are like).

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> **Highlight Box 2:** *Unintended gendered impacts of approaches to paid parental leave*
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> Gendered patterns of practice by parents in Australia in relation to early caregiving can illustrate attachments to rigid gender roles and stereotypical constructions of masculinity and femininity (Our Watch 2020, pp. 98-99). While existing policies aim to address such gendered stereotypes, there can be unintended impacts contained in the design of policies that can produce and support resistance to prevention efforts seeking to challenge gendered stereotypes, such as those responding to the unequal division of paid and unpaid labour between men and women.
>
> Policies around paid parental leave have progressed in Australia since the adoption of the *Paid Parental Leave Act 2010* (Cth) (Baird, Hamilton and Constantin 2021). Paid parental leave in Australia is a hybrid system that sits at the intersection of legislative entitlements, government policies, workplace bargaining outcomes, and company policies. The Paid Parental Leave Act is implemented via the Parental Leave Pay scheme, which grants a primary carer 18 weeks of paid leave at the national minimum wage, without superannuation contributions (Baird et al., 2021, p. 8).
>
> There are a number of disincentives for men to take parental leave in Australia. For example, the entitlements of 'primary carer' are conferred to the birth mother, who then has to transfer the entitlement to the father or partner if they are to be the primary carer. Other disincentives include payment at minimum wage (approximately 40% of average male full-time earnings), and stigma attached to men taking paternity leave or flexible work options. Data indicates that participation in the Dad and Partner Pay Leave Scheme remain low, with only 25% of eligible men and partners participating (Baird et al., 2021, p. 9).
>
> As a result, this can result in barriers to women's return to work, particularly when combined with high costs of childcare. This can have far reaching impacts on women's mobility and financial autonomy and security, including women's labour market participation, employment opportunities such as retention and promotions, as well as long-term financial security such as women's diminished superannuation contributions and retirement savings. This sustains gender inequalities and stereotypes around leadership and decision-making in private and public and women's vulnerability to coercion and financial abuse and inability to leave potentially violent relationships.
>
> Parental leave entitlements and policies have the potential to challenge gender stereotypes (such as who is the primary carer of children and who is the breadwinner). However, they can also contain unintended elements of appeasement and appropriation that are embedded into the design which limit the effectiveness of such policies in contributing to long-term change to achieve primary prevention aims.

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Appropriation

Appropriation involves an institution or individual creating the *perception* that gender equality is a shared goal or principle, but then avoiding taking the kinds of actions that would help achieve it (or stalling, hindering or undermining such actions leading to inaction). This occurs, for example, when organisational leaders state a commitment to gender equality, but fail to develop a meaningful strategy to address it. It can also occur when a strategy is developed, but no resources (both human and financial) are allocated to it, or when changes to problematic policies, structures or processes are continually avoided or postponed, or there is a lack of support for the education and capacity building initiatives that are required.

Adopting primary prevention but conflating the concepts of sex and gender is also a form of appropriation, where there are attempts to revert to language such as sex-based roles due to appeals that 'gender is too hard to understand'.[12] This depoliticises gendered approaches to understanding why and how violence occurs (See Dragiewicz, 2011, Chapter 6). As Dragiewicz (2011, p. 84) observes, "the failure to distinguish between sex and gender has a high cost" in attempting to understand and prevent gendered violence, where the "conceptual distinction between sex and gender is a valuable one to disentangle biological and social contributions to human behaviour, health, and social problems". Gendered social rules and behaviours dictate structures, norms and practices and these are fluid dependent on time and context.

By removing gender conceptually, the hierarchical power relations and characteristics of masculinities and femininities are removed from the conversation around what drives violence against women. This may have the effect of silencing people who do not identify with the binary categories of male and female (Rainbow Health 2020).

For example, in school-based respectful relationships education programs, due to resistance to a gender-based analysis of violence against women from some teachers, schools and students, 'gender-neutral' content has been adopted and explanations of violence have been framed in terms of individual behaviour rather than exploring the social and structural elements that drive violence against women (Our Watch 2021a). Adopting a change initiative but diluting its evidence-based and gendered underpinnings through appropriation undermines the purpose of such change.

When there is a commitment to action to address the gendered drivers of violence against women, but the responsibility for that action is placed on women, there can be an appropriation of women's representation. This may include, for example, setting up a working group or body to address sexual harassment within an institution, but appointing mainly women to the group.

Consequently, responsibility for changing men's behaviour is put back on those who are most negatively impacted by these behaviours and cultures, and who are also disadvantaged by the gendered structures, norms and practices they are working in. Women's participation is critical and should drive the priorities of addressing violence against women; however, addressing this problem should not only be women's

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[12] Sex is the biological categories of male or female associated with genitalia (although not accounting for intersex), whereas gender is the social constructs that are associated with and characterises those categories.

responsibility.

Challenging the gendered drivers of violence against women requires participation from entire populations, especially men and perpetrators/potential perpetrators, rather than just the victims of that violence. It ultimately sidelines the recognition and responsibility of addressing violence against women as a women's issue, and therefore 'women's work' (Crooks et al., 2007). Moreover, when only one 'type' of woman is represented to change gendered structures, practices and norms, it marginalises and silences other experiences of sexism and misogyny that are influenced by other intersectional power dynamics, such as racism, homophobia, transphobia and ableism (Our Watch, 2018; Rainbow Health, 2020)).

Appropriation may be a continuation of the status quo, but also very deliberate. For example, an institution or individual such as a leader must look like they are doing something for various reasons (e.g. public opinion, shareholders) while simultaneously limiting any meaningful action, or even putting in place mechanisms that are contrary to evidence and best-practice related to primary prevention of violence against women.

Co-option

Co-option is using the language of progressive frameworks and goals ('equality', 'rights', 'justice' and so on) to defend and maintain unequal structures and practices.

Co-option of feminist goals is common and has most clearly been centred on interpersonal violence and perceived unfair changes to laws related to divorce, child custody, support payments and family violence (Behre 2015; Dinner 2016; Flood 2010).

Attempts to shift focus in this context from intimate partner violence and victim safety to an emphasis on false accusations and fathers' alienation from their families and children has had relative success in influencing law reform and common attitudes (Behre 2015; Pease 2011, pp. 11-12). While these discourses portray themselves to be progressive appeals because they use the language of rights, in reality they are a deliberate co-option of gender equality frameworks and goals to maintain unequal gender structures and defend men's privilege (Behre 2015; Pease 2008).

For example, in Australia, decades of lobbying in the 1990s by father's rights groups contributed to the reform of the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth). The reforms emphasised 'shared parenting', prioritising parents' rights over children's safety. A decade later, 43% of Australians agree that mothers "often make up or exaggerate claims of domestic abuse to improve their case", demonstrating the widespread belief of women's false accusations of violence (Webster et al., 2018; Hill 2019).

This reflects, in part, a broader climate in which women are seen to be advancing at the expense of men (Evans et al., 2018). For example, there are examples of political leaders expressing concern about emerging mechanisms to advance the status of women, but that there are no 'Ministers for Men' (Dawson 2020). In the United Kingdom, Hon Ben Bradley MP in 2020 addressed the British Parliament, arguing that straight white men need more rights, emphasising the importance of being a 'bloke' and praising masculine stereotypes such as breadwinner status (Dawson 2020; Our Watch 2021).

This claim of 'reverse discrimination' and

threats to men's rights is due to (real or perceived) increases in women's political, economic and social participation and rights which fundamentally challenge men's privileged and entitled status (Flood and Pease, 2004; Kimmel, 2013). Salter (2016b,) for example details how men's rights activists have infiltrated discourses around male health promotion that conflate men's 'rights' with men's 'needs' with increasingly unclear lines of delineation.

Salter outlines how this conflation has become embedded in male health promotion and policy. It centres around claims that male health deficits and high mortality rates are a product of "anti-male sentiment and confusion around men's social and familial roles generated by feminism" (Salter 2016b, p. 70). This shift to men's health 'needs' is centred on claims around male victimhood and disadvantage that have consequences for male privilege (Salter 2016b).

Within institutions, co-option may manifest as the adoption of a gender equality workplace strategy that is neutral and couched in terms of equal opportunities for everyone (Colley et al., 2020, p. 8). Gender neutrality is "the attempt to address gender inequality but in ways that seek to equate men and women, and not be seen to advantage women" (Colley et al., 2020, p. 5). Gender neutrality is not neutral at all, because there is no recognition of the gendered and other power relations and hierarchies that impact women, men and gender diverse people differently. This approach might better be understood as 'gender blind' because it fails (or refuses) to acknowledge existing gender power relations.

This type of co-option can be seen in arguments made around meritocracy and gender quotas. Gender quotas are a widespread practice to increase women's representation and participation in male dominated arenas such as political and economic decision-making positions.

Women's leadership and increased decision-making is an essential action under *Change the story* and is critical for the achievement of gender equality. Often proposals for gender quotas to achieve this are met with arguments that may sound like:

- 'we believe in gender equality, there are just no qualified women'.
- 'if there were qualified women, there would be nothing stopping them getting to those positions based on merit'.
- 'it is women's own decisions to choose those types of (lower-paid, feminised) professions'.
- 'women are too emotional, they won't be good leaders'.

The 'myth of meritocracy' is well captured by Murray (2015), who states

It is rather insulting actually to suggest that the reason why elite, wealthy, middle-aged white men dominate politics and other echelons of power is because they deserve to – because of their greater merit. This suggests, by inference, that under-represented groups, including women, ethnic minorities and people from less privileged backgrounds, are relatively absent from politics because they don't deserve to be there.

This kind of defence of privilege and co-option occurs across the socioecological model and uses women's individual 'choices' as a reason for their disadvantage. Arguments based on merit fail to acknowledge the gendered structural

barriers women face in accessing those positions, while those in power do not recognise and see their own advantage and privilege (Flood and Pease, 2005). Krook suggests that if meritocracy was an accurate portrayal of how individuals and groups access opportunities and achieve power, the violent backlash against the increasing participation of women in political spaces for instance, would not occur (Krook 2020).

Co-option is a form of resistance that can explain the way in which gender equality goals may be used by institutions and organisations to maintain unequal structures and practices. For example, setting up of consultative groups that have experiential and empirical knowledge and expertise around certain issues is a critical component of community engagement and design of policies, laws and other institutional architecture. However, consultations can become 'tick box' exercises, where consultations are held with little of the input incorporated in the overall design of the final output. Stakeholder participation can be co-opted to legitimise a policy or law for instance, with few or none of their substantial recommendations incorporated. Therefore, an institution can claim they have consulted with a community, while maintaining the status quo. As *Tracking Progress in Prevention* notes:

> *Currently, of those governance and coordination mechanisms that are publicised, strategies are frequently led by particular agencies (for example, communities, women, health) and supported by interdepartmental mechanisms such as committees (with relevant departments). Few strategies articulated any centralised interdepartmental mechanisms to lead primary prevention activity.*

> *Analysis also revealed that funded and formal mechanisms to ensure that civil society organisations participate and collaborate in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of violence against women prevention policies were not consistently employed. A number of strategies and policies made no mention of such mechanisms, while approaches in others ranged from cross-sectoral advisory bodies tasked with providing expertise and oversight, through to time-limited issue- or activity-based community consultation bodies. Future investigations could explore whether coordination mechanisms – or advisory bodies established to coordinate and inform efforts to prevent violence against women – incorporate consultation across broad social policy areas, make appropriate efforts to centre the voices of women and ensure representation across the Australian population (Our Watch 2020a, p. 29).*

Expertise, best practice, evidence and advice can be co-opted where it is moderated or watered down with the effect of undermining actions to address—and sometimes reinforces—the gender drivers of violence. There are a number of examples of this, including the notion of shared responsibility between victim and perpetrator that is reflected in some policies and programs, including counselling. Another example is the inclusion of material on maintaining unhealthy and violent relationships, encouraging reconciliation and creating a shared responsibility for violence between partners that can be promoted through some sex education programs. This occurs despite evidence indicating that there is a

need to centre gendered power relations and consent, and have whole of school approaches to consent and schools-based sex and relationships education programs.

Co-option occurs when interventions adopt the goals, and some of the discourses and language of primary prevention, but then water down the content of policies, laws and interventions to produce effects that actually undermine or directly contradict the principles of primary prevention.

Repression

Repression is the reversal or dismantling of a change initiative once implementation has begun. As feminist activists pursue greater change and transformation, often they have a double burden of activism, simultaneously fighting to maintain existing achievements that are at risk of repression. This form of anti-gender and anti-feminist resistance is active with appeals to 'traditional' and 'natural' gender roles that seeks to reverse and dismantle gender equality initiatives, occurring at a local *and* global scale (Corredor 2019; Cupać and Ebetürk, 2020). Corredor (2019, p. 616) refers to and defines the term 'gender ideology' as:

> [A] rhetorical counterstrategy that aims, first, to refute claims concerning the hierarchical construction of the raced, gendered, and heterosexual order; second, to essentialize and delegitimize feminist and queer theories of gender; third, to frustrate global and local gender mainstreaming efforts; fourth, to thwart gender and LGBTQI equality policies; and finally, to reaffirm heteropatriarchal conceptions of sex, gender, and sexuality.

The use of 'gender ideology' co-opts gender discourses to repress and reverse feminist goals of equality as trying to challenge the 'natural' sex and reproductive roles between men and women and destroy 'traditional' families and family values, an 'intrusion' and 'interference' into people's 'private' lives. It often coalesces around discussions regarding same-sex marriage and sex and gender education in schools (Corredor, 2019; Law 2017

Repression can also consist of a broader pattern of institutional inaction and backlash that is characterised by the removal or *absence* of support and resourcing for primary prevention of violence against women and gender equality policies and programs. This absence of support and devaluing of women's labour that corresponds with stereotypical constructions of the work women do in the private sphere (such as caring), is amplified in the context of the Covid-19 economic climate where the importance of essential services provided by female dominated industries being on the frontline of the pandemic (childcare, nursing, aged care, childhood education) have clearly been underscored (Our Watch, 2020b, pp.21-22).

Reducing or halting support and resourcing to violence against women prevention infrastructure can be considered repression given the ongoing prevalence of violence against women. In an organisational context, repression may look like the weakening of robust primary prevention policies or removal of them all together. Repression, especially resourcing, can be predicated on sustaining and sometimes reinforcing the gendered drivers of violence by prioritising ideological values and beliefs over evidence and best practice.

Repression, therefore, is removing and/or

watering down a primary prevention intervention, policy, or law or defunding an initiative as part of efforts to reverse or dismantle gender equality initiatives. It can be driven by individuals and groups through influencing and lobbying decision-makers to dismantle progress made towards challenging violence against women.

Backlash

The most explicit and active form of resistance to primary prevention and gender equality is backlash. It manifests in many different forms that encompass a broad range of deliberate actions, behaviours, practices and structures. In its extreme forms, backlash is overtly and deliberately hostile and can involve physical, sexual and online violence and threats of violence. However, it is also exhibited through a range of aggressive and attacking discourses, behaviours and actions that deny the problem of men's violence against women and deliberately undermine primary prevention of efforts and gender equality goals. These forms of backlash are more 'mainstream' and can be exhibited by individuals as well as organised groups that may be seen as 'reputable' and 'authoritative' on such issues.

Salter (2016b, p. 70) discusses how some individuals in the men's rights movement in Australia label themselves as men's health experts and consultants and align themselves with sympathetic academics and health practitioners. Such resistors who display sexism and misogyny (as well as racism, ableism and homophobia) often invoke 'political correctness' to justify continued repression and oppression.

For example, claims of 'political correctness' or references to the 'PC police' (those who call out misogyny and sexism) have been used to try to counter the increasing recognition of sexual harassment embodied through the #MeToo movement, where feminism is represented as having 'gone too far' (See Our Watch 2019, p. 92; Gottell and Dutton, 2016). Claims of 'political correctness' are often justified by use of 'freedom of speech' at an institutional level and comments like 'don't be so sensitive, can't you take a joke' at a more individual level (see, e.g., Crabb 2019).

Backlash is well documented, within a body of literature that maps men's rights activists in Australia and internationally (Archer 2018; Our Watch 2019; Flood et al., 2018). Research indicates that some men's rights activists seek to undermine feminist efforts by claiming that feminism perpetuates sexism and a world where men are oppressed: "feminism is seen as a movement that victimises men and boys" (Our Watch 2019, p. 92).

Research indicates that men's rights and fathers' rights movements emphasise a crisis of masculinity and are underpinned by men's assumed entitlement to social power (Blais and Dupuis-Déri 2011; Dragiewicz 2011; Salter 2016b; Schmitz and Kazyak 2016). This kind of backlash is predominantly online in what has been termed the 'manosphere' and is a loose network of people who are, among others, men's rights activists, father's rights activists, and incels (involuntary celibates, men who claim aggrieved entitlement and sexual disenfranchisement) (Ging 2017; Menzie 2020).

Marwick and Caplan (2018) describe the manosphere as a loosely organised online network consisting of a set of blogs, podcasts and forums that connect men's

rights activists, pickup artists, anti-feminist and fringe groups that coalesce around claims of 'misandry' (hatred of men). A number of mass murders and terrorist attacks, such as the 2019 Christchurch terror attack, refer to explicit gender ideology and incel manifestos (True, Chilmeran and Johnston, 2019).

Phelan, Johnston, and True express the view that the perpetrator of the Christchurch attacks, drew inspiration from a global network of like-minded people, explicitly displayed misogynistic, racist, bigoted and homophobic grievances and condemned "the decline of fertility rates and destruction of the family unit" (Phelan, Johnston, and True 2020). Such misogynistic attitudes often intersect with xenophobic, racist and homophobic attitudes and beliefs. These types of individuals, groups and movements pose serious threats to the safety of those advocating for the prevention of gendered violence.

Increasingly, online and virtual spaces have become a forum for backlash, including instances of "cyberstalking; rape blackmail videos; malicious impersonation; "sextortion" (the blackmailing of targets in order to extort them to perform sexual acts online); revenge porn (the non-consensual uploading of sexually explicit material of a subject without their consent); and "doxing" (the publishing of personally identifying information, usually to incite internet antagonists to hunt targets in "real" life)" (Jane 2017, pp. 34-35). Such backlash targets individuals, programs and policies, specific organisations, and broader societal norms and structures. This type of backlash and online misogyny is also disseminated in mainstream media, social media and online forums towards individuals, women as a group, persons of colour and the LGBTIQ community and men who acknowledge violence against

women as a pressing issue (Gardiner, 2018; Jane 2018; Petty et al., 2018).

For example, in an analysis of The Guardian's 70 million online comments, Gardiner (2018) found that women (and Black, Asian and minority ethnic) journalists attracted a higher percentage of reader comments that were blocked by moderators due to violating community standards compared to articles written by men, regardless of the subject matter. This was intensified in male dominated sections of news such as sport, which speaks volumes of where women are 'allowed' to work and have voice. The negative and violent backlash against women through online abuse and harassment for doing their job has profound negative implications on their professional and public lives as well as their private lives.

Some female journalists have had to withdraw from social media platforms due to attacks directed towards their families (Jane 2018). For example, Guardian journalist Jessica Valenti was one of 10 writers who received the most blocked comments and eventually withdrew from social media when a rape and death threat was directed at her 5-year-old daughter (Jane 2018, p. 577).

Networked misogyny and gaslighting intersect with racism, religious bigotry, homophobia and other forms of discrimination to threaten women journalists – severely and disproportionately. Threats of sexual violence and murder are frequent and sometimes extended to their families. This phenomenon is also bound up with the rise of viral disinformation, digital conspiracy networks and political polarisation. The psychological, physical, professional, and digital safety and security impacts

Understanding, monitoring and responding to resistance and backlash

Such backlash also occurs in more 'ordinary' spaces, including in organisations and institutions. For example, anti-feminist backlash has been especially prominent in response to the #MeToo movement, which has exposed the endemic sexual harassment women experience in workplaces (Flood 2019). In line with beliefs that women fabricate sexual harassment and that men are vulnerable and at risk of such accusations, there has been an observed institutional backlash towards engaging professionally with women, including mentoring women, meeting female colleagues alone, not meeting with women men do not know well or who are subordinate to them (Williamson 2020, p. 8; Soklaridis et al., 2018).

Women participating in male dominated arenas can face extreme forms of backlash, hostility and harassment simply because of their presence. This form of gender and sexual harassment "can be understood as expressions of hostility toward individuals on account of their sex or gender" (Foley et al., 2020, p. 3). Gender harassment is non-sexualised behaviours based on an individual's sex or gender (Foley et al., 2020, p. 4). This includes crude remarks or jokes, demeaning comments or banter, questioning an individual's competence based on their gender, hostile comments that signify a particular gender does not belong, intimidation, sabotage, scrutiny of work or workplace behaviours, and refusing to comply with the directives of a senior

colleague of a different gender (Foley et al., 2020, pp. 3-4).

In a consultation with men working in male-dominated industries, the [Australian Human Rights] Commission was told that sexual harassment can occur as a form of backlash against quotas to increase the representation of women in male- dominated workplaces (Australian Human Rights Commission 2020, p. 150)

In research with women working as pilots and automotive tradespeople in Australia, where women only comprise 6% and 2.5% of employees respectively, Foley et al., (2020) found women's experience of gender harassing behaviours was constant, sometimes daily, and in some cases, on an hourly basis. The most frequent forms of gender harassment experienced by female pilots and automotive tradespeople were sexist remarks and banter from male colleagues who would make "jibes about 'feminism' and a woman's place being 'in the home'". One female manager in the automotive industry detailed a sustained campaign of demeaning comments made by male trainees, junior to her rank, with comments such as "Clean up after me, you're the woman", "You know what's funny? Women's rights" and "He's single. Why don't you get married and have kids like you're supposed to" (Foley et al., 2020, p. 8).

The research indicates often women would not receive support or help from their supervisors who were often bystanders and/or participants in such behaviour, where a "boys club" culture and male peer relations was prioritised over women's inclusion and safety at work (Foley et al., 2020, pp. 8-9). As the authors note, "several participants understood gender harassment to be a form of resistance by

male colleagues who felt threatened by women's encroachment into a previously all-male domain" (Foley et al., 2020, p. 9). Furthermore, these forms of gender harassment came from both senior and junior male colleagues as well as clients.

Gender harassment in such male-dominated workplaces is institutionalised in formal and informal structures, norms and practices, signalling to women they are unwelcome interlopers, "better suited to roles of wife and mother than they are to paid employment in male technical domains" (Foley et al., 2020, p. 11).

Backlash, like all the forms of resistance outlined here, is itself a continuum of reactions to the progress (or attempts) made by proponents of primary prevention of violence against women, feminism and gender equality goals. Backlash deliberately makes women feel unsafe or unwelcome in certain spaces to maintain male privilege and advantage, the 'boys club' and male entitlement in public and private life, in communities, organisations and institutions. It is predicated on essentialist understandings and patriarchal stereotypes of women and men, where women are seen as inferior and subordinate and deserving of the violence they experience. When women step outside the bounds of those stereotypes, harassment, abuse and violence may be seen as justified 'to put women back in their place'. Racism, homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, ableism and other forms of discrimination can compound this violent backlash.

Although backlash can often be framed as an extreme version of resistance, it can also be mainstream and echo common widespread denials of gender inequality.

Highlight Box 3: What about men? Men are victims too!

'What about men' responses to gendered approaches to the prevention of violence against women are a commonplace and ubiquitous form of resistance. 'What about…' questions can be appropriately raised by men who disproportionately experience negative impacts due to marginalisation based on other forms of identity such as race, class, disability and sexuality

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Understanding, monitoring and responding to resistance and backlash

(Our Watch 2019, p. 88). These structural inequalities intersect with gender and rigid gender norms of masculinity. For example, essentialist understandings around dominant forms of masculinity that promote heteronormativity and Cisnormativity are often associated with high levels of bullying and violence experienced by men who are gay, bisexual or trans (Our Watch 2019, p. 88). This violence is reinforced through essentialist and binary understandings of gender, that promotes homophobia, biphobia and transphobia (Rainbow Health 2020, pp. 9-10; Our Watch 2019, p. 88; see pages 12-17). Primary prevention of violence against women does not discount men's experiences of violence and the negative impacts of rigid gender norms, practices and structures.

Rather, primary prevention of violence against women efforts highlights that women experience much greater impacts of violence and gender inequality, that men are the majority of perpetrators of violence against women *and men,* and that men benefit from the gendered systems that privilege men as a group over women as a group. As detailed in *Men in focus* (2019, p. 85), "the same dominant norms and practices of masculinity and structures of power that privilege men over women, and some men more than others" impact negatively on men's lives, including men's mental health outcomes, suicide rates, and victimisation of male perpetrators (see also pp. 85-89).

Often, these kinds of "what about" responses seek to shift the focus to men's experiences as victims. An analysis of Facebook comments responding to Our Watch's ***Doing Nothing Does Harm*** campaign (which addresses disrespect that makes women feel uncomfortable, unsafe, put down, or unfairly treated) illustrated the prevalence of 'what about men' responses. In specific coding of the 8 different forms of resistance for 100 Facebook comments to one advertisement[13], 63 comments displayed one or more forms of resistance. Overwhelmingly, these comments rejected the message of the campaign about disrespect towards women, reversing the message and mention disrespect towards 'men' or neutralising the message that disrespect happens towards 'everyone' and is not gender specific. For example:

⇒ *"What about disrespect towards men? Or is that ok? 😊"*
⇒ *"There is also disrespect towards men too"*
⇒ *"what about disrespect towards men? Is that ok or nah?"*
⇒ *"What about disrespect toward men. Who puts up these ridiculous sexist ads. Each gender is just as important as the other. You should be ashamed."*
⇒ *"you only put it towards women. Did you know that men get disrespected as well it's not a gender thing. your website does more harm than good"*
⇒ *"All I hear is woman woman woman. no help for men."*

These kinds of defensive statements individualise violence against women using anecdotal evidence rather than any understanding of the structural gender dynamics that drive violence against women in all its forms. This kind of resistance rejects the notion that we all have a part to play in critically examining our learned sexist behaviours, attitudes and internalised misogyny (Flood 2019, p. 289; Our Watch 2019, p. 84; see also Eaton 2018).

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[13] Our Watch. 2020. "When you see disrespect towards women online, Show its not OK. Comment thread" Facebook, November 16, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/514475628623089/posts/4766701273400482

Therefore, 'whataboutery' has elements of most forms of resistance and backlash by:
- minimising the extent of violence against women
- reversing discrimination and framing men as victims
- not acknowledging responsibility to critically reflect on complicitly in the perpetuation of patriarchy and the gendered drivers of violence
- appeasing by framing women as being in need of protection rather than addressing perpetrator actions and the broader norms, practices and structures that sustain the gendered drivers of violence
- appropriating and co-opting language by concealing structural power dynamics and using rights-based language to advocate for men's rights
- and being aggressive and violent.

Given the prevalence of 'what about men' and other similar statements in response to primary prevention efforts, there are opportunities to consider how to anticipate and address this kind of resistance from the outset. This includes expecting these questions and statements, having a menu of responses, and building such considerations into the primary prevention initiative. Such interventions can be used as an opportunity to create conversation and dialogue and to educate people about the disproportionate impacts of violence against women and create conversation. As another Facebook commenter responded in support of the **Doing Nothing Does Harm** advertisement:

> *The number of men commenting "What about men?" in these kinds of posts is so frustrating. Of course we should be respecting men. But in a patriarchal society typically (stats support this) it is women that are disrespected. Yes, it happens to men too and that's not okay. But these kinds of posts are to raise awareness about WOMEN.*

Conclusion

Resistance and backlash to primary prevention of violence against women approaches and interventions can manifest in various ways. As illustrated in the above discussion, resistance can be based in ignorance or a lack of willingness /refusal to recognise complicity in the gendered norms, practices and structures that sustain the gendered drivers of violence. Resistance can be quite passive, or more deliberate. It can be motivated by a view that changes to the status quo will unfairly reduce some individuals' and groups' social, political and economic power, privilege and status. The more passive forms of resistance underpin and reinforce the more deliberate and aggressive forms of backlash.

Resistance happens across the socioecological model and in different settings that are critical to the achievement of primary prevention of violence against women goals. It is inevitable or highly likely in response to change processes that seek to change the gendered status quo. Being able to identify, observe and document how resistance and backlash (as reinforcing factors for violence against women) manifests and changes over time is therefore important as it may help inform strategies to prevent it and/or to respond effectively to it, and thereby contribute to the achievement of prevention goals.

The next part of this report proposes an approach to monitor resistance, with a focus on institutional and organisational settings.

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Part 4 - Monitoring resistance and backlash

Monitoring resistance and backlash involves identifying, analysing and documenting the various forms of resistance to primary prevention of violence against women (both active and passive, implicit and explicit) and examining the particular dynamics of resistance in a given context. As shown in Part 3, resistance is complex and non-linear, manifesting in discourses, policies, laws, and resourcing and funding processes, as well as being exhibited by individuals and groups. Resistance to primary prevention in institutions and organisations is shaped by dynamic and interconnected internal and external social, political and economic factors that create resistance to change and help to maintain the gendered drivers of violence and patriarchal status quo.

Monitoring resistance to primary prevention of violence against women is an important part of change processes that can indicate progress and barriers to the achievement of violence prevention. Monitoring institutional and organisational resistance to primary prevention of violence against women applies to a range of interventions that could have:

1. Identified individual and collective stakeholders which are affected by a primary prevention of violence against women intervention, initiative or program.

2. Institutional and organisational architecture such as laws, policies and practices that relate to primary prevention of violence against women.

3. Available data and knowledge of gender, the drivers of violence against women and resistance and backlash to support analysis.

The approach to monitoring outlined in this section can be used in a range of contexts, including for example:

- *Workplace, Equality and Respect* processes

- respectful relationships education and engaging young people in education settings

- media reporting of violence against women

- advertisement campaigns challenging the gendered drivers.

By identifying when, where and how resistance is occurring, primary prevention changemakers can begin to understand why resistance is occurring and how they might respond to and counter this resistance. The monitoring process can involve reflection on what changes have been achieved and what is blocking further change and can help inform discussion of the potential improvements that can be made to a change strategy to overcome such resistance to primary prevention.

This monitoring approach is iterative in nature and should be returned to throughout a primary prevention initiative (planning, implementation and evaluation) to understand whether resistance has been appropriately countered and whether new forms have emerged. By actively looking for resistance and integrating the

monitoring of it into planning, there is the opportunity to understand (1) what pockets of resistance already exist and use strategies to address and minimise it, and (2) what to look out for in the later stages of the initiative.

This part of the report provides a suggested approach to monitoring resistance, with a focus on the institutional and organisational level. It draws from systems approaches to social change to try and account for the inherently complex and crosscutting nature of primary prevention of violence against women change efforts and interventions.

A Spectrum of Change

Different organisations and institutions are going to resist in different ways depending on 'where they are at' in terms of addressing the gendered drivers of violence against women: from those that have no strategies, to those demonstrating basic compliance and less effective approaches, to those that are adopting gender transformative approaches. Viewing institutions only as 'male-dominated' and 'female dominated' and predicting levels of resistance on this basis is too simplistic and could reproduce essentialist understandings of institutional responses to gender inequality.

Rather, it may be beneficial to think about institutions and organisations along a continuum of change and resistance (Fig. 4). Approaching institutions and organisations in this way accounts for the contextual nature of resistance as well as appreciating the diverse journeys institutions and organisations undertake towards achieving gender equality.

[i]t is no longer a question of what to do "if" resistance occurs but rather how we

prepare ourselves to be intentional and mindful with our responses "when" it happens. We have found that significant change invariably involves generating resistance and that its absence often indicates that only incremental or minimal real change is happening in the organization. (Gallegos et al., 2020, p.166)

Resistance can only be monitored in relation to something. If there is no specific change initiative in place (such as a primary prevention program or a policy, legal or external infrastructure that aims to achieve institutional and organisational change), it can be considered the continuation of the status quo. Given the development of Federal, state and territory and sector-specific legislation and policy frameworks for gender equality and primary prevention in Australia, most institutions and organisations have obligations to varying degrees to implement some measure of prevention of violence against women initiatives and associated gender equality commitments.

Therefore, monitoring resistance and backlash involves not only identifying explicit actions that seek to block change, but also looking for absences and silences in organisational operationalisation of such institutional architecture for change. At the same time, care must be taken not to alienate late adopters to primary prevention; but rather, to identify where more could be done and provide suggestions for how change could be accelerated. Strategies to respond to resistance and backlash need to address its various and intersecting sites and manifestations (discussed in Part 5), as well as understanding the context of where the resistance is coming from.

Literature and research on resistance and

backlash indicates that gender 'neutral' terms such as merit, numerical representation, pay equity and so on can serve to re-entrench the more invisible and informal gendered institutions – that is, the formal and informal structures, norms and practices that sustain gender inequality. It is important to capture the entire institutional and organisational picture, considering the formal achievements like policies, frameworks and laws, but also the informal blockages to implementation, such as discriminatory cultures or exclusive informal decision-making. Where institutions and organisations are at can be approached in terms of a spectrum of change.

For example, one organisation may be doing the bare minimum whereas another may be actively seeking transformational change. We can also consider what drives change and what has caused an organisation to reach a tipping point and recognise the need for cultural change to achieve gender equal norms, practices and structures. This might be for example, a review of sexual harassment in an industry/workplace, a cultural reckoning in terms of attitudes and behaviours towards women, or the introduction of legislation such as the Victorian *Gender Equality Act* (2020) (Vic).

Figure 3. Spectrum of approaches

No consideration of gender, or reinforces gender (in)equalities	**Less effective approaches**	**Gender transformative approaches**
For example:	For example:	For example:
Perpetuates gender inequalities	Bare minimum in responsibiities to gender equality	Actively challenges unequal gender norms
Ignores or denies the gendered drivers of violence	Tokenestic inclusion of women	Survivor centred, including established and accessible mechanisms for support.
Discriminatory norms, practices and structures	'Tick box' approach	Harm minimising strategies
	Acknowledges gender norms, practices and structures but addresses them in ad hoc ways	Regular quantiative and qualitative analysis of the state of gender inequality which is used to inform improvements to strategy
	One off and/or short-term initiatives to address the gendered drivers of violence	Critical insitutitonal and individual awareness and self-reflection of complicity in harmful gender norms, practices and structures
	Relying on women to support and sustain primary prevention goals	Intersectional approach to recognise and address intersecting forms of discrimination
		Integration of primary prevention into institutional and organisational core business
		Long-term and sustainable primary prevention change intiatives

Understanding, monitoring and responding to resistance and backlash

This approach may be helpful as an organisation that has no considerations of gender and/or primary prevention is likely to display resistance from denial to backlash indicating the need for strategies to minimise and respond. An organisation displaying limited efforts to primary prevention or gender equality measures indicates a degree of support for or uptake of gender equality, but may also indicate co-option, appeasement and appropriation of gender equality initiatives, or elements of denial and disavowal.

For example, there may be formal policies supporting family violence leave or flexible work arrangements, but they are implemented on an ad hoc basis and the organisational culture does not support or encourage uptake. As such the institution looks like it is 'doing gender', but this is only on the surface. In contrast —drawing from Penderson, Greaves and Poole (2014)— gender transformative approaches "actively strive to examine, question, and change rigid gender norms and imbalance of power" to address inequalities and transform harmful gender norms, practices and structures (Rottach et al., 2009, p. 8 in Penderson, Greaves and Poole, 2014, pp. 142-143).

Gender transformative approaches to primary prevention are holistic, victim-survivor centred, accountable to women and girls and individuals and communities that experience intersecting structural inequalities and discrimination, and enable the substantive inclusion of diverse women. It is these approaches that enable the long-term operationalisation of primary prevention and gender equality goals by redistributing power and resources.

Some institutions may have elements of both transformative approaches and effective and promising primary prevention practice and elements of less effective or harmful practices (See Our Watch 2021, Appendix 2). An attempt to implement a radical primary prevention intervention in an institution that has no existing strategies for gender equality, or that actively perpetuates and reinforces the gendered drivers of violence, is very likely to encounter resistance.

Thus, determining how an institution and organisation already approaches the prevention of violence against women and broader gender equality efforts will help influence how to plan for and minimise resistance and backlash, and how to respond when it occurs (Part 5). Mapping institutional and organisational norms, practices and structures and any pre-existing manifestations of resistance will help inform this understanding of the context and help changemakers to determine where they might dedicate time, resources and energy in order to convince the institution/organisation about the importance of addressing the gendered drivers of violence.

Monitoring resistance & backlash

Achieving primary prevention of violence against women goals requires institutional transformation, meaning profound changes across the entire institution including changes to dominant values and beliefs. Further, institutions do not sit in silos, but are influenced by a range of other structures. Thus, achieving prevention of violence against women and gender

equality goals is a complex, multifaceted and layered endeavour, requiring a holistic approach to include all in that process. Importantly, such an approach must also be underpinned by an implicit understanding of how intersecting power dynamics and forms of discrimination can further complicate efforts to identify and counteract resistance and backlash.

This includes accounting for individuals, organisations, and institutions connected through relationships, interactions and resource exchange, together forming a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts (Kania et al., 2018).[14]

To monitor resistance to primary prevention of violence against women, the monitoring approach uses systems thinking that 'bounds' an institution by:

1. Defining the problem, which is resistance and backlash to primary prevention change efforts and interventions.

2. Identifying the key aspects of the system that contribute to, influence or positively and negatively affect the achievement of primary prevention of violence against women goals.

3. Understanding the internal and external patterns of system behaviour, how each of the critical parts of the system, such as long-term resourcing, policies, legislation and so on, function, and how they interact to reinforce or stabilise other parts of the system, such as organisational culture and norms.

4. Identifying change points and levers that will create shifts within the institution and organisation by addressing and responding to resistance and backlash.[15]

Processes of change within institutions require continuous reassessment, both of new challenges and new incentives for change that emerge. Monitoring resistance and backlash should be undertaken throughout the planning, implementation and evaluation of a primary prevention change intervention. It should primarily be done by those implementing the primary prevention initiative with support and input from key stakeholders and allies from different parts and levels in an organisation who are supporters of primary prevention of violence against women.

Reflective practice

Monitoring resistance and backlash should be underpinned by a reflective practice approach to help practitioners think through where resistance might be occurring not only in terms of individuals and themselves, but also in terms of institutional and organisational architecture.

The *Putting prevention into practice* Handbook advocates for a reflective practice as a critical component of prevention work that aims to be intersectional and transformative (Our Watch 2017, p. 70). Firstly, it ensures critical *self*-reflection as it prompts practitioners to reflect on their own privilege and assumptions or prejudices that may impact their work and relationships. For

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[14] Organisations are a subset of institutions that is a defined body with structure and hierarchy and internal rules and regulations, such as a workplace or particular setting. The term organisation is used in the guide to denote the concrete mechanisms for implementing a primary prevention initiative as a strategy of organisational development and change

[15] Our Watch, Evidence Review: Approaches and methods for evaluating complex violence prevention initiatives (unpublished); Dozois, E., Langlois, M., Blanchet-Cohen, N., 'A Practitioner's Guide to Developmental Evaluation', 2010, pg. 37. The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation and the International Institute for Child Rights and Development.

example, experiences of resistance and backlash are going to be different when they are encountered by a white able-bodied woman from an English-speaking background compared to a woman of colour who is a first-generation migrant in Australia.

I really focus on white privilege...myself as an example the [other] prevention practitioner, she's [from India] and I've actually had a look at myself as a white privileged woman and I'd probably get a job over her if I went and applied for a job... I speak clear English. I haven't really had the challenges that she's had. I'm not coming over to a new country so I even use myself with that when it comes to privilege...I'm not as privileged as a man a white male, [but] you do have advantages over many other people.[16]

Secondly, reflecting on the institution and organisation and the role of the practitioner and where they are positioned may impact the relationships and dynamics with others in the institution. This can influence where and how resistance and backlash manifests. For example, if the changemaker is an 'outsider' to an institution, they will be received differently and have different relationships with members of the institution compared to someone who is already part of that institutional setting.

Monitoring resistance and backlash can be usefully divided into five 'institutional and organisational themes' (Fig. 5) containing several different elements within each. Drawing from existing research and guides on systems and institutional transformation the themes have been created to connect

the more formal institutional aspects of resistance and backlash, with the informal gendered structures norms and practices that constrain the operationalisation of gendered approaches to prevention of violence against women and identify where resistance is coming from.
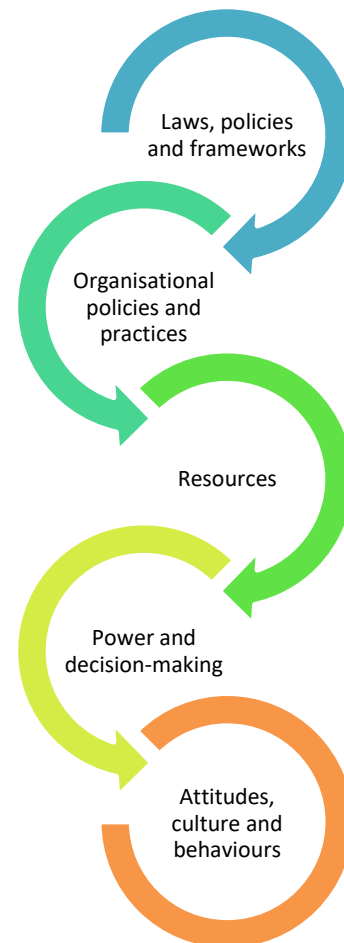

Figure 4. Themes of institutional change and resistance

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[16] Stakeholder 4, 2021.

Follow the laws, policies and frameworks

This theme is aimed at looking at the external formal institutional architecture that structures organisations including Federal, state and territory and local laws, policies, rules and regulations. It is a process to account for what an organisation is required to implement and how an organisation may be resisting that. For example, the *Gender Equality Act* in Victoria is legislation that requires defined entities to operationalise and implement certain obligations internally with timelines and deliverables such as Gender Action Plans.

This theme recommends organisations reflect on how they have adapted mechanisms like the *Gender Equality Act*, to suit the context of their organisation and how they monitor and evaluate the success or failures of an initiative. In doing so practitioners can identify the different forms of resistance to a specific law, policy, rule and regulation and what they need to do to respond to it.

Follow the organisational policies and practice

Internal organisational policies and practices includes aspects like Workplace, Equality and Respect initiatives, sexual harassment policies, domestic violence leave, flexible working arrangements, or an organisational gender equality policy or statement. This theme includes thinking through formal and informal practices that may be 'unwritten' like hiring and promotion practices, programs and activities like leadership or mentoring programs for women. For example, is there an informal practice that sees senior men unwilling to mentor women? Is a belief in meritocracy something that is prioritised over diversity

in hiring practices? This theme asks organisations to reflect on their internal architecture.

Follow the resources

Adequate resource flows are critical for any progress towards gendered transformational change. This includes allocation and distribution of financial and human resources, gender expertise and dissemination of information, and coordination and communication about goals, opportunities and outcomes.

This theme recommends reflection not only on how organisations use resources to support implementation and operationalisation, but also what type of resources they are using (e.g. knowledge) and whether these are coordinated and supported across the organisation or whether the change process is siloed. If primary prevention is given low organisational and institutional priority, this will reduce engagement and investment with the change process. This lack of prioritisation will reduce the long-term sustainability of gender transformational change.

Follow the leaders, power, and decision making

This theme asks organisations to reflect on the distribution of decision-making power, authority and formal and informal influence among individuals and organisations (Kaina et al., 2018). For example, is there a difference between leadership's formal commitments and the kinds of informal comments made about gender equality in the break room? Are there different standards for women, men and LGBTIQ+ leaders?

Additionally, it asks how the formal

institutional architecture has been adapted into internal organisational structures, (e.g., have policy frameworks been watered down?). It also contains prompts to reflect on how and where decisions are being made (e.g., are they made during informal socialising in contexts where some individuals may not feel welcome or accepted?).

Follow the culture, attitudes and behaviours

This final theme focuses on the dominant institutional and organisational culture, behaviours and attitudes. For example, what kind of attitudes are condoned? Is there a strong culture of behaviours such as bystander support? How are policies such as domestic violence leave or flexible working arrangements perceived? This theme recommends reflecting on broader community norms, practices and structures and how these influence organisations' work on prevention and gender equality.

Conclusion

The five themes outlined above and the different elements that make up each one attempt to capture the external and internal dynamics that influence and effect the sufficient and necessary requirements to achieve violence prevention goals, and the patterns of institutional and individual resistance interwoven in them. Through reflective practice, practitioners are asked to think about the gaps between violence prevention commitments and operationalisation and whether resistance is present. This can serve as a guide throughout the planning and establishment phase of primary prevention change initiatives and regularly revisited. For example, it can be used before the change initiative begins to understand the external context and anticipate what to ask and

watch out for in order to minimise and avoid resistance, and it can be revisited at several points during implementation and evaluation to identify ongoing resistance to help inform the development of strategies to respond.

Part 5 - Responding to Resistance & Backlash

Resistance is a common reaction to change, where something disrupts taken for granted norms, practices and structures that are seen as 'traditional', 'natural' or 'the way things have always been done'. Primary prevention of violence against women often challenges deeply held beliefs, norms, values and ideologies. However, resistance to primary prevention efforts does not always have to be framed in terms of a negative phenomenon. It can be indication that transformation is occurring. It can also provide a learning opportunity for prevention practitioners; exploring and trying to understand why resistance is occurring and what form it is taking, can help changemakers to respond in appropriate and effective ways that help reduce resistance and build engagement and support for the change.

> *In some ways I've always felt like resistance is a gift because it teaches you about what is the actual nature of the problem and if you're not experiencing resistance, you haven't found it yet.*[17]

Two types of strategies are explored in the following sections. The first set of strategies are actions that aim to **minimise** resistance and backlash to primary prevention change initiatives in organisational settings. These strategies prioritise transparency around the initiative, collaboration and networking, and individual and organisational self-reflection.

The second set of strategies look at ways to **respond** to resistance and backlash, although many minimising strategies can be carried over into response activities. The final section begins to conceptualise what opposing actions or outcomes could look like to correspond with the 8 forms of resistance and backlash described earlier. Using the monitoring resistance and backlash approach and other tools to ascertain readiness for the introduction of primary prevention (Part 4) will indicate where energies need to be focused to minimise and respond to resistance.

Strategies to minimise resistance and backlash

Institutional and organisational contexts will differ, but a key aspect of minimising resistance and backlash is to plan for how it might manifest and anticipate from whom and where in the institutional and organisational structures resistance may emerge. Planning for resistance should become part of overall planning for prevention activities and be considered at all stages of the prevention cycle (understand, explore, plan, implement, evaluate and learn) (Our Watch 2017, p. 109).

When meeting resistance, it can serve as a reminder to revisit this planning cycle, to keep checking back in and considering what needs more work to strengthen the approach to primary prevention of violence against women.

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[17] Stakeholder 1, 2021.

The following strategies have been drawn from practice guides for implementing primary prevention of violence against women initiatives such as *Putting prevention into practice,* and Our Watch's Workplace Equality and Respect tools and resources as well as other resources on institutional and organisational gendered change initiatives more broadly.

Leadership and support

Effective organisational prevention of violence against women requires strong leadership endorsement, governance structures and fostering an organisational culture that consciously supports equality and respect and works to challenge and shift the gendered drivers of violence against women (Our Watch 2017).

This requires identifying key actors who have formal and informal influence, who can help to change formal mechanisms, policies and procedures as well as influence informal modes of institutional/organisational culture and those around them. It may be useful to undertake a process of stakeholder mapping to help identify the key or influential individuals, gatekeepers, and champions of change (Our Watch 2017).

Getting leaders on board to support primary prevention helps ensure the allocation of adequate resources and time to the change initiative. Encouraging organisations to formally or explicitly 'opt in' to primary prevention interventions helps ensure there is a level of existing leadership commitment and allows more effective scale-up of programs (Our Watch 2021, p. 47).
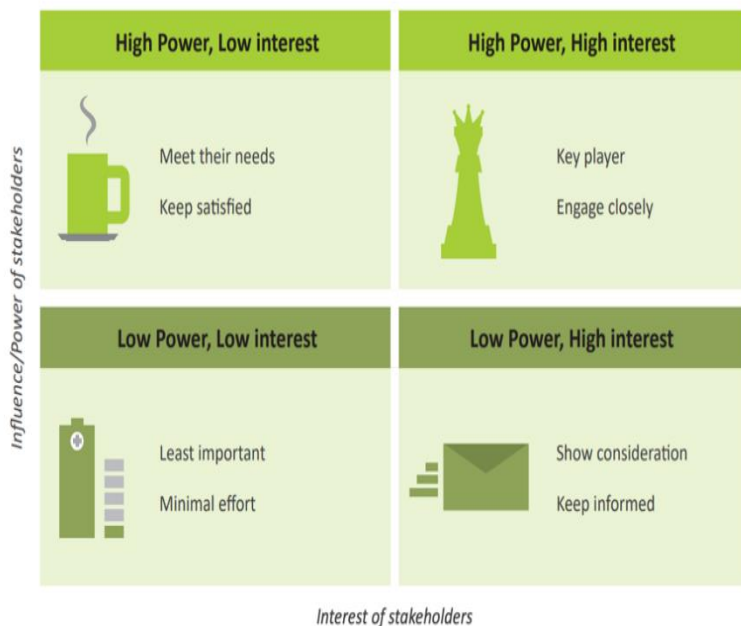

Figure 5 Stakeholder mapping matrix

Use this matrix to identify the key stakeholders who will influence or be impacted by your prevention strategy remembering that every sector, institution, organisation, community and individual has a potential role to play in preventing violence against women. The matrix can also help identify who might be invisible or excluded from a stakeholder mapping process through the inclusion of key questions to assist with making the stakeholder group gender equitable and inclusive (Our Watch 2017).

Understanding, monitoring and responding to resistance and backlash

However, sometimes getting leadership support can be challenging as it requires time for leaders to reflect on their own perspectives and potential biases as well as the effects of primary prevention on the broader institution and/or organisation. For instance, the Leadership Shadow model can help leaders reflect on and assess their own performance to determine how effectively they are supporting prevention of violence and gender equality.

By reflecting on "what I say", "how I measure", "what I prioritise", and "how I act" (Fig. 7), leaders can consider the impacts of their behaviour as well as how they model leadership standards for the broader institutional and organisational structure (Chief Executive Women (CEW) and Male Champions of Change (MCC) 2018 p. 12). This can help leaders understand how they may be subconsciously or consciously resisting primary prevention initiatives at individual and institutional levels.
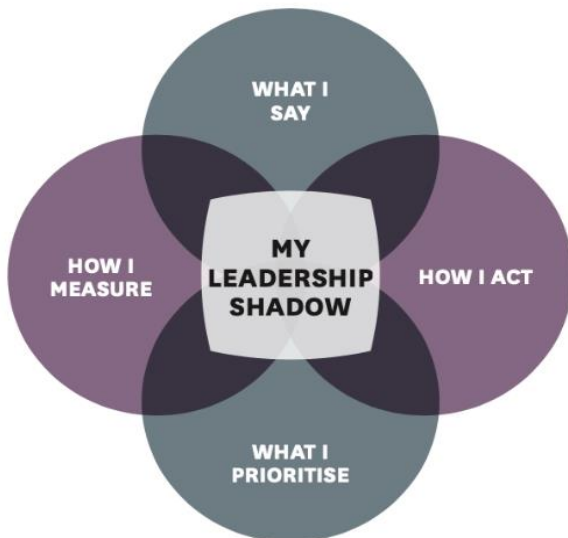

Figure 6: Leadership Shadow Model

Working with leaders 'where they are at' is important to build capacity for them to be informed and committed to preventing violence against women and support driving and sustaining change. This includes bringing others on board, creating an environment that is conducive to primary prevention, and empowering individuals to speak up and take action when they see sexist or discriminatory behaviour, knowing they will be supported.[18]

Securing and maintaining leadership support may minimise resistance and backlash and help 'cascade' the central tenets of primary prevention initiatives throughout the institution and organisation (CEW and MCC 2018, p. 19).

> *It has to be driven by leadership otherwise people don't take it seriously. When the Chief Executive Officer turns around and says, "you need to do this", it gets done. When the little project officer turns around and says, "can we do this", [the response is] "Oh yeah maybe, [but] we don't have time". That's one thing I learned, it must be executive driven... Once there was [leadership] pushing [primary prevention] forward, then we got a lot more traction.[19]*

Information and analysis

Information regarding dominant attitudes towards prevention of violence against women and the gendered drivers will assist in ascertaining the 'readiness' of the institution/organisation and avoid an

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[18] See Our Watch (2019), Tools and Resources: Engaging leaders and securing commitment, available at https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au/tools-and-resources/engaging-leaders-and-securing-commitment/

[19] Stakeholder 4, 2021.

unrealistic 'zero to hero' approach that tries to implement something too big and too fast that the institution and its individuals are not ready for (See Part 4 on a spectrum of change). Consulting and engaging a diverse group of actors and stakeholders (involving not only visible supporters of primary prevention and gender equality initiatives but also those who may be unconvinced), will help increase the readiness for change and build support for action by 'planting the seed' for change.

Consultation

Consultation before the initiative has begun provides opportunity for actors to provide feedback and to reflect on and identify the ways in which gender influences and shapes institutional norms, practices and structures. This could be done in several ways, such as through confidential or anonymous surveys, informal conversations, focus groups, email and social media, and inviting people to share their thoughts on something as simple as 'what keeps them up at night'. It is an opportunity to ask people —who may not previously have had the time or inclination to think about it— 'how does gender impact your lives?' and to then discuss this.

This might involve for example, highlighting the gendered division of labour (who does what at home), or the type of work women do outside the home, or discussing examples of gender stereotyping that people have seen or experienced.

Although this may seem like a laborious process before the initiative has even begun, it helps create a foundation for future work and assists in identifying where pockets of resistance —and also support and allyship— may already exist or have the potential to emerge.

Data

Collecting gender-disaggregated data is important to establish the institutional and organisational landscape: what does the organisation look like? For example, borrowing from Our Watch's WER Gender Equality Indicators, data can provide a snapshot of the status of gender equality in an organisation, establish a baseline to track progress over time, inform critical discussion around barriers to institutional and organisational change, and help make the case for resourcing primary prevention.

This analysis should also encompass the cultural and informal ways an institution operates including dominant norms, practices, attitudes and behaviours that might not be captured through consultation.[20] Participatory ways to include a range of stakeholders are important and can be completed through processes such as a gender audit or an organisational self-assessment.[21] Much of the data collected will also contribute to providing evidence in the approach to monitoring resistance and backlash.

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[20] European Institute for Gender Equality, Institutional Transformation: Gender Mainstreaming Toolkit (2016, p. 18) outlines the positives and negatives of external and internal processes of gathering these types of information.

[21] Our Watch (2017), Workplace self-assessment, https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au/resource/workplace-equality-and-respect-self-assessment-tool

Understanding, monitoring and responding to resistance and backlash

> *Highlight Box 4: Our Watch Workplace Equality and Respect (WER) tools and resources*
>
> Our Watch's Workplace Equality and Respect (WER) Self-Assessment Tool is a guide that provides information for facilitators to conduct internal reflection on the leadership, strategies, norms and practices of workplaces to determine progress towards meeting a set of five WER standards.[22] It is an iterative tool that fosters ownership and prioritises participation of workplaces in assessing their commitment to gender equality and what needs greater attention and progress within an organisation.
>
> Our Watch Workplace Equality and Respect (WER) Gender Equality Indicators support workplaces to establish a baseline to track progress, to engage in discussions in workplaces, and make a case for resourcing efforts to promote gender equality. The indicators are:[23]
>
> 1. Ratio of men to women in workforce, overall and by teams
>
> 2. Ratio of men to women in leadership and management positions, including Board, executive, senior and middle management level
>
> 3. Ratio of male and female new hires and internal promotions, by level and department
>
> 4. Average salary gap between female and male staff members across the organisation and by department
>
> 5. Comparison of male and female staff and managers who use flexible work arrangements
>
> 6. Comparison of male and female staff who use and return from parental leave with continued employment for 12 months
>
> 7. Changes in staff perception of workplace culture as measured by annual staff survey
>
> 8. Reported incidence of sex-based discrimination and harassment

Gender informed methods and approaches

In addition to information and data, introducing gender analysis and methods (see below on expertise) in institutional architecture not only contributes to operationalising primary prevention principles, but can also help counter resistance by integrating gender equality into institutional and organisational modes of operation, culture and core business. This is achieved by introducing and maintaining a commitment to gender-sensitive quantitative and qualitative methods that account for how women and men are affected differently by the formal institutional architecture. This also provides an opportunity to incorporate other power-related dynamics that shape people's lives, such as race, sexuality, and disability.

Such methods include gender-impact assessments, gender budgeting, and gender analysis of the "conditions, needs, participation rates, access to resources and development, control of assets, decision-making powers etc" (European Institute for Gender Equality [EIGE] 2016 p. 31).

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[22] The Our Watch WER standards can be found here: https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au/what-is-workplace-equality-respect/.
[23] See Our Watch (2017), Workplace Gender Equality Indicators (Key Progress Indicators), https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au/resource/workplace-equality-and-respect-key-progress-indicators/

Understanding, monitoring and responding to resistance and backlash

Customised tools to suit existing processes to integrate gender considerations that address the gendered drivers of violence against women can also be developed to avoid time burdens or primary prevention being seen as 'extra work', as this perception often produces resistance.

Knowledge and gender expertise

Being able to respond to resistance requires quick thinking and easily accessible facts and knowledge around the gendered drivers of violence.[24] There are several guides to help respond to common forms of resistance, such as responding to 'curly questions' and managing difficult questions (See Highlight Box 5).[25]

Common forms of resistance often individualise violence against women. Therefore, it is important to have a firm grasp and understanding of the concepts and relevant theories and research relating to gender, masculinities, and the gendered norms, practices and structures, in order to be able to respond in knowledgeable and persuadable ways.

Understanding *Change the story, Changing the picture, Men in focus* and other key frameworks that guide primary prevention of violence against women in Australia is crucial. For advocates and practitioners working within institutions, this also means being able adapt to the context by developing content that fits with the organisation's mode of operation and culture.

Highlight Box 5: Managing difficult questions[26]

1. Understand that resistance and backlash is an inevitable part of a change process.

2. Be present in the conversation by acknowledging the other person's question or concern.

3. Be open, looking for common ground and values that you both agree on.

4. Be prepared, including planning for the types of questions you might receive, having the right information and evidence about gender equality and violence against women.

5. Practice talking about the gendered drivers of violence against women, formulating responses that are short, clear statements supported by evidence and examples.

6. Make time for self-reflection on the discussions and assumptions and values you bring to the work.

7. Respect the people you are engaging, starting with acknowledging that many of the issues may challenge people's identity, beliefs, behaviour, life choices and privilege.

Sometimes, people who are implementing change processes may not have the expertise required to respond to high levels of resistance and backlash, especially in settings that have pre-existing backlash

towards gendered drivers of violence (such as social media, some political parties and institutions, male-dominated sporting codes and sectors and so on). In these instances, it is useful to connect and work with

[24] Our Watch, 2020. Quick Facts, https://www.ourwatch.org.au/quick-facts/
[25] See Highlight Box 12 for further resources.

[26] See Factsheet 1 in Our Watch, 2019, Practice guidance: Dealing with Backlash, https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au/resource/practice-guidance-dealing-with-backlash

violence prevention specialists and specialist organisations to support the primary prevention change process (see Section 5.1.5 below).

Communications

A communication strategy that is transparent, raises awareness and strengthens commitment to addressing the gendered drivers within the organisation is important in minimising resistance both internally and amongst key external stakeholders and the general public (EIGE 2016, p. 28). The objectives of primary prevention, and an explanation of the gendered drivers of violence against women need to be clearly articulated and tailored to suit the audience, including opportunities for specific training and knowledge dissemination of why the institution is undertaking primary prevention.

Communication channels (emails, newsletters, meetings, social media, websites, public events, leadership statements and so on) are an opportunity to introduce primary prevention as a strategy that aligns with institutional and organisational values. With leadership endorsement this can help mitigate resistance towards the initiative. By effectively communicating the change process – both what the organisation is doing and the goals and reasons behind these actions, an organisation can help mitigate any fears and anxieties about the impacts of primary prevention initiatives.[27]

For example, this is particularly pertinent with regards to changes in organisational practices such as hiring, retention and promotion practices, where there is often a need to debunk myths around meritocracy and negative perceptions of quotas or affirmative action, by illustrating the broader structural and systemic barriers women and other marginalised groups experience in accessing employment and career opportunities (CEW and MCC 2016).

Institutional legitimacy

A key component for the long-term sustainability of primary prevention is creating the capacity for the change to be successful. This includes the necessary human and financial resourcing of the initiative (and associated awareness and capacity building) as well as legitimising the initiative through its location in the organisational structure and the time, energy and attention it is afforded. This might include making it a standing agenda item at regular organisational, departmental and team meetings; ensuring inclusive and gender-sensitive language in internal and external communication and events; and connecting to events highlighting violence against women and gender equality (e.g., 16 Days of Activism) as a way to re-commit to primary prevention and highlight ongoing efforts.

Changes of personnel in decision-making positions can also be challenging and produce resistance. Despite the institutionalisation of gender equality through policies and laws, individuals may resist and be unsupportive of gender equality or have little or no knowledge about gender issues. A 'revolving door' of personnel makes it difficult to have consistent and sustainable shared learning and action around primary prevention (FESTA 2016).

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[27] See Our Watch. (2019). Practice guidance: Communications guide. Available at: https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au/resource/communications-guide/

To minimise resistance, it is important to establish relevant institutional mechanisms to ensure open dialogue between individuals responsible for implementing primary prevention and relevant decision-makers/people in positions of power. This could include organisational leaders sponsoring the initiative, or individuals responsible for primary prevention directly reporting to specific leaders (e.g., Minister or CEO).

Partnerships, allies and networks

Driving change alone can be difficult, often leading to people feeling overwhelmed, fatigued and burned out. Self-care of those advocating for and implementing primary prevention is of upmost importance.[28] To avoid feelings of isolation in those who are responding to resistance, it is crucial to involve a broad range of actors in leading change and to build connection with others who support gender equality and primary prevention in the institution, and those who have implemented other change initiatives in the institution.

Finding others in similar positions implementing primary prevention across different settings enables people to learn from their challenges and successes. Other approaches could be to set up an internal advisory group with a mix of internal and external leadership and actors such as those who have the potential to change certain policies (such as HR staff), or a taskforce with other inclusion initiatives to share best practice and resources where appropriate.

The growing prevention workforce across Australia can provide a wealth of experiential, practical and theoretical knowledge in advocating for and implementing primary prevention, as well as the different types of resistance people and organisations have faced and how they have responded. Connecting to share learning and best practice is essential for progressing this work.

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[28] See Flood et al., (2021) for tips on how to practice self-care when responding to resistance and backlash.

Highlight Box 6: Conversation Container

As an intersectional analysis highlights, other power dynamics such as race, sexuality, and indigeneity may be more influential in some people's and groups' experiences of violence than others. This means that different movements and activists can have differing priorities or opinions on how to best go about prevention and what requires more concentration. This may bring about fears that long fought for gains can be lost meaning resistance can manifest even within coalitions and amongst allies and partners with similar social justice goals such as those working to prevent violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, LGBTIQ+ people and communities, women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, migrant and refugee women, women with disabilities, and young people and children.

Even with differing priorities and standpoints, coalition building, solidarity and collaboration is a critical component of advocacy and civil society activism, to ensure effective advocacy for people facing marginalisation and discrimination. Inclusive partnerships between different stakeholders are necessary to ensure initiatives benefit from diverse perspectives, and knowledges, are developed with appropriate representation and that different interventions and initiatives are seen to have legitimacy.

Resistance from apparently like-minded groups and people may be overcome by practicing mutual critical reflection on why such resistance may be occurring and how each group may be feeling similar things. One example given was that of a 'Conversation Container'. One practitioner described how in a partnership aiming to address violence against women and violence against LGBTIQ people, the two organisations came together to discuss their fears and anxieties. As this practitioner described:

We had a conversation where we admitted there were fears and anxieties on both sides and that we want to set a safe, robust partnership… [we held] a conversation container with a third party to facilitate who helped us surface those things and address them, [and develop] guidance [to put] in place and move ahead … [we would do] that in good faith knowing that if we weren't ready we weren't ready [and] we wouldn't attack the other person for being courageous enough to share whatever our resistance was. We had some fears and resistance to this as well [but] the actual process was fantastic. We did have some challenges along the way but overall, it improved things dramatically. So, creating a space where it's really obvious because what it also allows us to do is to name what we're really fearful of and if that's in the other team and they're not telling us they are having the mirror held up to them whether they know it or not and it also [an opportunity] that we have to then think about our own resistance.[29]

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[29] Stakeholder 1, 2021.

In this case, bringing in a third-party facilitator who has no investment in the partnership and establishing a safe and inclusive space for candid conversation and reflection allowed for resistance to be acknowledged and then overcome. Such processes of mutual critical reflection and sharing can be used in other settings, such as between different institutional and organisational actors.

Some principles for setting up a conversation container:

1) Using a neutral facilitator
2) Willingness to be open and candid
3) Shared acknowledgement of fears and anxieties from all sides
4) Establishing rules for a safe and inclusive space together, including confidentiality to avoid fear of retribution

Open debate and discussion

Open discussion and debate can contribute to persuading those in the 'moveable middle' of the importance of addressing the gendered drivers of violence within an institution (Vic Health 2018). It provides opportunities to disseminate information and challenge myths about whether or how violence disproportionately impacts women. It can also be useful to identify pockets of resistance that may come from unexpected places. Agócs (1997, p. 918) emphasises that rigorous debate can produce better understanding and solutions and can be a valuable contribution to analysis and change-related actions. However, debate and discussion must be entered into in good faith from all involved, with a willingness to respectfully listen, learn and engage in mutual critical reflection.

We've had people who are very brave come forward and say, "I have some concerns and fears and lack some understanding but I'm aware that I'm probably wrong I'd love for you to educate me - would you be comfortable having a conversation with me to help me learn." Some of these people are in quite high positions of influence. Those people [may] have internal resistance but are then managing and preventing it from becoming an external problem and their concerns are absolutely worth talking about and [I am] more than happy to engage with them. The difficulty being is... when we are expected to educate people who engage in bad faith. When we are in certain conversations [we need to] actually name this conversation "you're not showing enough good faith or enough care or concern for our position in this conversation thus we will not be having it"[30]

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[30] Stakeholder 1, 2021.

Strategies to respond to resistance and backlash

To counter resistance and backlash to primary prevention of violence against women, a suite of approaches is required, encompassing the entire socioecological model. Responding and engaging with resistance requires patience, kindness, firm boundaries and, fundamentally, accountability to addressing the gendered drivers of violence against women (Gallegos et al., 2020, p. 168).

Vic Health (2018) outlines four ways to prepare for managing and responding to resistance:

1. Framing strategies in terms of how you articulate, communicate, or 'frame' the importance of the initiative;

2. Organisational strategies to involve leaders, individuals and groups, and address policies, practices and organisational structures;

3. Teaching and learning strategies including teaching processes, the learning environment, content and expertise of educators; and

4. Individual strategies to identify allies, self-care for advocates and practitioners, and focusing efforts on those you can influence.

For example, Common Cause and Vic Health have developed several values-based framing guides on gender equality and masculinities. The guides outline responses to resistance that are aimed at engaging people's deeply held values to motivate individuals concern and action on gender inequalities. The gender equality messaging guide classifies audiences as supporters of gender equality, opponents to gender equality, and the 'persuadables' in the middle, who have less fixed views on gender equality.

'Persuadables' are also referred to as the 'moveable middle' in the sense that with the right framing, we can move and persuade people to become supporters of gender equality. On the flip side of this, the moveable middle can also shift to being opponents of gender equality. However, the moveable middle are the individuals and communities that can be persuaded to support primary prevention of violence against women goals.
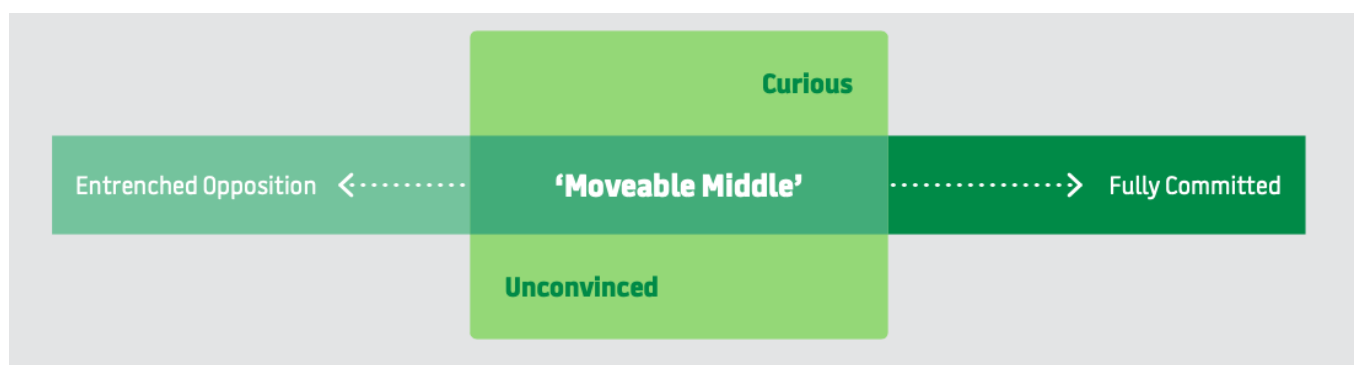

Figure 7: The spectrum of resistance (Vic Health 2018, p.6)

Positive messaging that engages people's values can be a powerful tool to convince people on the necessity of gender equality to prevent violence against women. The guide outlines a useful decision matrix that assists in knowing when to respond to resistance, making clear that sometimes, engaging with opponents on gender equality can take away valuable time and resources and push the conversations into "unhelpful value frames like individual choice, tradition, and biological differences between men and women" (Vic Health, 2020, p. 10).

Understanding opponents' language and value frames can assist in re-shaping the message and counter resistant messaging. Highlighting eight gender equality issues and the common resisting responses, the guide outlines how to reframe the message to tap into people's values such as fairness, honesty and respect. The guide follows a story structure of 'vision, barrier, action' to build positive frames to demonstrate how to approach resistance to different barriers to gender equality like targets and quotas for women in leadership.

Highlight Box 7: Finding the right approach

To overcome resistance and backlash to primary prevention, multiple approaches are needed to convince a diverse group of people about the necessity of addressing the gendered drivers of violence. Not every person will be convinced, "there will always be a group that is never coming to the party, you just want to make them the less dominant group".[31]

A practitioner working on the prevention of gendered violence in workplaces and unions described the different ways they approached integrating prevention policies and frameworks into those settings. They began with messaging as 'the right thing to do', which initially received substantial and active forms of resistance.

Consequently, focus was shifted to an industrial rights-based justification to address gendered violence. While this approach was more effective, the strategy that was most effective and persuaded the most people was the incorporation of prevention of gendered violence into Work Health and Safety frameworks. If a worker is injured, the employer has the responsibility to maintain safe working environments and can't dismiss it as a policy issue given obligations under Work Health and Safety laws and frameworks.

Framing gendered violence as a workplace safety issue allows unions to advocate for incidences of violence to be taken as seriously as other injuries and for workplaces to implement prevention initiatives such as Workplace Equality and Respect standards. (See Victorian Trades Hall Council 2017).[32]

This approach reduced denial and disavowal as to whether gender inequality exists, but as something that happens to workers and therefore a responsibility for employers and unions to take action about.

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[31] Stakeholder 3, 2021.
[32] Stakeholder 3, 2021.

Similarly, *Engaging Men: Reducing Resistance and Building Support* proposes a spectrum of strategies to engage men in violence prevention, such as mobilising men within communities as allies, working with fathers or male caregivers, and law and policy reforms addressing men and gender (Flood et al., 2021). The resource provides helpful and practical tips for responding to resistance and backlash at an individual level, including building relationships with men informed by a realistic assessment of the barriers to male engagement in violence prevention.

The resource advocates for a combined strengths-based framework and human rights approach where commitments are made to work with everyone in the community, while underscoring common rights to safety and equality (Flood et al., 2021, p. 4).

It refers to men's navigation of different norms and practices of masculinity depending on the context, with their peers, online, at work and at home for example, shaped by institutional structures and norms.

This underscores the importance of connecting the dots between addressing the gendered drivers of violence against women as 'a training I had to do at work' with challenging, for example, sexist peer cultures among friends and taking bystander action.[33] This can be difficult for men (and women) to challenge sexist and misogynistic peer cultures as there may be real or perceived consequence of a loss of social status among male peers, intensified policing of their gender and sexualities, and criticism, mockery and ostracisation (Flood et al., 2021, p. 4).

Highlight Box 8: "There are some jobs women can't do, like garbage jobs"

In a training with a group of local government workers in waste disposal, one practitioner described the types of resistance they faced in changing organisational perceptions around women's participation in the sector. With this particular group of workers, garbage collections happen in isolated areas perceived as less safe, where one man would go out to collect rubbish. In discussions around how to increase the number of women working in the group, male participants said "there are some jobs women can't do, like garbage jobs".

The implication was that women couldn't do this kind of job because they would be unsafe and at risk; their absence from such work being a form of protection. In response to this, the practitioner raised the possibility of changing workplace practices and received the response that "you can't go that far, this is how things have always been done". By highlighting other aspects of workplace change, where in fact such changes to practices and policies occur all the time, the practitioner questioned why addressing women's participation was unacceptable where other change had been accepted and implemented, reinforcing that "perhaps the workplace is at a point in its history where things must change". For example, sending two staff members to isolated areas to collect rubbish, and highlighting the importance of women's participation.

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[33] For information on how to do something, visit https://www.doingnothingdoesharm.org.au/how-to-do-something/

Overcoming resistance

Working with individuals, groups of people and institutions who remain resistant to primary prevention of violence against women and gender equality is sometimes necessary. Finding the right levers to overcome resistance can be challenging, what works in one context, may not be successful in another.

Moreover, some people may never accept responsibility for their part in the change process. The goal is bringing the institution at large and as many individuals as possible along the journey to achieve a society free from violence.

Highlight Box 9: Michael Flood, Dealing with resistance

In his book *Engaging Men and Boys in Violence Prevention*, Flood (2018) outlines strategies to reach and engage men and change their behaviour, including an examination of face-to-face education and media and communications campaigns. To move towards this goal, he highlights the importance of men's critical self-reflection and providing safe spaces to do this. In his chapter on 'Dealing with Resistance', Flood presents several useful ways to deal with men's resistance to primary prevention interventions and programs. This encompasses an examination of both the content and processes of such endeavours (2019, pp. 325-332).

Content:
- Make it real
- Draw on culturally appropriate materials
- Personalise women's disadvantage
- Make analogies to other forms of inequality
- Substitute race and gender in examples to highlight potentially similar experiences of discrimination
- Appeal to universal values
- Expose false parallels
- Address men's own experiences of gender

Processes
- Acknowledge one's privilege
- Document inequalities
- Imagine walking in women's shoes
- Listen to women
- Make the familiar strange
- Bring men into intimate dialogues

Flood underscores the importance of addressing men's underlying emotions that contribute to resistance. Efforts "must acknowledge and work with men's fear and anger, the emotional undercurrents of men's defensiveness and hostility, and men's feelings of shame or sadness as they begin to realise their roles in privileges and injustices" (2019, pp. 332-333).

Understanding, monitoring and responding to resistance and backlash

Practicing Curiosity

Responding to resistance requires patience, a curious practice, and effort to find points of connection. Being curious as to why someone is resisting, rather than just basing judgements on assumptions, can help find the right approach to respond. As one practitioner describes:

We develop a threat mapping skill set that whenever someone is difficult or comes at you with hard energy you map them as part of the problem and try to manage them rather than going hold on what's, going on for that person right now…you need to hold your perspective, but you also need to look at where [their] learning journey is, how do I think of you, how do I think about the people watching the conversation and how do I think about myself.[34]

Maintaining a curious perspective as to why someone is displaying resistance and using open ended question such as "Can you tell me more about this" to seek clarification, can often prompt those resisting to think more about the reasons why and counter some of that resistance (Women's Health West 2015). Other approaches could be written self-assessments of common behaviours that appear benign to then prompt discussion of how they actually form part of the gendered drivers of violence (Petty et al., 2018). Fundamentally, conversations must be supported with correct knowledge, information and data—why practising is so important—to be able to minimise and reduce resistance.

Being curious about people means recognising that individuals approach primary prevention with their own experiences (both related and unrelated to violence) (Flood et al., 2021). This can be supported by several informal strategies that can lead to unexpected outcomes. For example, as another practitioner states:

I remember I was doing a training one time and there's just someone, and she was so frustrating, and I could easily go she's so resistant, she's so annoying. [But] one of my little strategies is I always go to the person I find the most frustrating in the lunch break and make a point to go and talk to them and ask how's your day going. I was talking to this person and I didn't say anything about what happened in the room, I just asked "how's your morning going" and she just had a terrible day, a terrible morning… in the end it had nothing to do with the training but I could have easily gone, "urgh, problematic" and the cycle [continues].[35]

These informal strategies can go a long way to challenging our own assumptions about someone's resistance and connecting with them.

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[34] Stakeholder 1, 2021.

[35] Stakeholder 2, 2021.

Finding Connections

Finding points of connection means establishing shared values, experiences, forms of privilege and discrimination. Many privileged groups don't see themselves as such (see Section 2.1). Depending on the context, activities such as privilege walks can be helpful in physically demonstrating the ways in which some people and groups are more privileged than others (Flood 2019, p. 329). Values mapping is another useful tool to identify what is shared between people rather than what divides them.

For example, in the case of unions, practitioners delivering prevention of violence against women training in workplaces would share their own experiences of joining a union. The trainees would then do the same to build understanding. By encouraging conversations around the values that drive unions such as justice, fairness, 'no one being left behind', and safety at work, it would build a foundation to connect such

union-based values to gender equality.

A similar approach can be taken with respect to stereotypes, where participants were asked to reflect on when they are stereotyped, as unionists as corrupt or thuggish, and how they could relate those feelings of frustration and hurt to others stereotyped negatively. While union membership is optional and does not have the same consequences or influences on peoples' lives such as gender, it is assumed that by building empathy, it would make it harder to justify resistance.

As Pease (2012, p. 138) explains, "When men are emotionally engaged in the injustices experienced by women, they are more likely to interrogate their own complicity in women's oppression and to recognise their responsibility to challenge their own unearned advantages". Fundamentally, even while being curious and establishing shared connections as access points to persuade individuals about the necessity of primary prevention,

care must be taken to continuously centre the gendered drivers of violence against women and not excuse discriminatory norms, practices and structures. Even while minimising and responding to resistance and backlash, "women and girls' empowerment must remain central to prevention activity" (Our Watch 2015, p. 28).

At a broader institutional and organisational level, strategies to minimise institutional resistance can also be used to respond, such as fostering leadership endorsement and buy in, legitimising primary prevention as a core part of the institutional and organisational architecture, and using legal and policy levers to advocate for the need for primary prevention interventions. In Part 4, an approach to monitoring resistance and backlash was outlined, which seeks to capture the multiple and dynamic ways resistance manifests at institutional, organisational and individual levels.

Highlight Box 11: Tips for finding connections

- Build understanding in what drives the individual or collective in terms of shared values and work ethic and demonstrate how violence prevention and gender equality corresponds with that: See **Box 9** on the different ways offered by Flood in approaching this, as well as Vic Health's messaging guides listed in **Box 12**.

- Demonstrate how other processes of change have been accepted and integrated in the institution and organisation and draw comparisons.

- Underscore how women and men's experiences differ (e.g. unpaid labour, norms around leadership).

- Ask people to reflect on their own personal lives, including asking women close to them about their lives and thinking about how they differ to their own.

Highlight Box 12: Resources for responding to resistance and backlash

⇒ _Backlash and buy in: Responding to the challenges in achieving gender equality_, Chief Executive Women and Male Champions of Change, 2018.

⇒ _Engaging Men: Reducing Resistance and Building Support_, Flood et al., 2021.

⇒ _Feminist Pocketbook Tip Sheet 9,_ '_Backlash: What is it and how do we address it safely?_' Coalition of Feminists for Social Change (COFEM), 2018.

⇒ _Framing gender equality: Message guide_, _Vic Health, 2021._

⇒ _Framing masculinity: Message guide_, Vic Health, 2020.

⇒ Practice guidance: Dealing with backlash, Our Watch, 2019.

⇒ _Responding to Resistance_, Partners in Prevention, Domestic Violence Resource Centre.

⇒ _Speaking publicly about preventing men's violence against women: curly questions and language considerations_, Women's Health West, 2015.

Understanding, monitoring and responding to resistance and backlash

Opposing actions to resistance

The nascent field of resistance and backlash to primary prevention approaches of violence against women and engaging men and boys has importantly focussed on mapping the various dimensions of the problem. It has begun to build and expand on a valuable collection of strategies to respond to resistance, which this research contributes to.

Less focus has been placed on mapping the corresponding solutions. Understanding the nuances of resistance and the different forms it can take means that we can and should think carefully about what the opposing solutions are and to map out the dimensions of what we are trying to achieve: challenging harmful gender norms, practices and structures through short- and long-term implementation to realise primary prevention and broader gender equality goals. That is, a society in which women and their children live free from violence.

What does championing look like? What does avowal look like? What does solidarity look like? What is a positive framing and how do we know that that is working? We don't want to fall into the trap of "you're resisting, no you're resisting". Although useful, it is so negative and not the whole thing[36]

Table 1 aims to establish a positive framing to resistance work that corresponds with the 8 forms of resistance already conceptualised in the prevention of violence against women sector. [37] This could potentially be used in collaboration with a monitoring guide, to assist practitioners, leaders and the violence prevention sector to think about what resistance is occurring, what kinds of actions to take and to keep centring the goals of prevention.

As discussed in this report, those advocating and implementing primary prevention can be fatigued by less obvious progress or entrenched opposition that may seem insurmountable. Further development of the approach outlined below may provide people working towards violence prevention goals with action-focused strategies to overcome apathy and burnout and to counteract resistance.

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[36] Stakeholder 2, 2021.

[37] Our Watch thanks Belinda O'Connor and Maria Delaney for sharing their expertise to contribute to this point.

Table 1 Opposing actions to resistance

Form of resistance	Actions to address resistance
Denial • Denying the problem exists including minimising its extent, significance or impact. • Renaming and redefining it out of existence. • Blaming victims for the problem. • Denying the credibility of the message on the basis that it is supposedly irrational, untruthful or exaggerated. • Denying the legitimacy of the issue by attacking the credibility of the messengers of change by impugning their motives and marginalising them as a special interest group.	**Recognition, acknowledgement and acceptance** • Draw attention to the problem that exists, emphasising gender power relations as the underlying drivers of violence against women. • Framing primary prevention not in zero-sum terms. • Promote understanding of the intersection of structural dynamics and the impacts on violence. • Centre and give credence to victim-survivors' experiences and voices in institutional architecture and service delivery. • Provide and promote qualitative and quantitative empirical evidence on the gendered nature of violence against women. • Promote input of researchers, policymakers and advocates and acknowledge their expertise.
Disavowal • Refusal to accept responsibility to address the problem or participate in the change process.	**Affirming and avowing** • Affirm the importance of accepting responsibility for challenging the gendered drivers of violence and for owning the issue (including the need to be self-reflective of complicity in gender inequality and other reinforcing factors such as racism, ableism and homophobia that contribute to violence against women).
Inaction • The refusal or failure to implement or progress towards the goal of gender equality by excusing inaction (e.g. 'it is not a priority') or delaying or blocking action (e.g. 'it's unnecessary' or 'there are not enough resources').	**Taking action** • Take steps to unblock barriers to addressing the gendered drivers of violence based on evidence, best-practice and policy and integrating gender equality into organisations and institutions. This might involve heightening the priority given to the issue, persuading leaders and finding alternative resources.
Appeasement • Placating or pacifying those advocating for change while simultaneously putting off or limiting any meaningful action and impact.	**Engaging and prioritising** • Engage genuinely and respectfully with those advocating for change, amplifying their voices and becoming a champion and ally.
Appropriation • Simulating change while covertly undermining it.	**Ensuring transparency and supporting implementation** • Expose counterproductive action and operationalise genuine long-term change initiatives through achievable goals and solutions with monitoring and evaluation processes in place.
Co-option • Using the language of progressive frameworks and goals such as 'equality', 'rights', 'justice', 'needs' and so on to defend and maintain unequal structures, practices and discriminatory status quo.	**Positive dialogue, accountability and building solidarity** • Defuse or demobilise oppositional behaviours and channel energy into productive dialogue for common goals. • Enable proponents of change and ensure that the voices of those most impacted (especially women and girls, victim-survivors) remain heard. This might require critical self-reflection on power relations and privilege.
Repression • The reversal or dismantling of a change initiative once implementation has begun.	**Momentum and sustainability** • Embed primary prevention efforts in policies, plans and budgets, and otherwise integrate for long-term sustainability.
Backlash • A broad range of deliberate and aggressive behaviours, discourses, actions, practices and structures that deny men's violence against women and deliberately undermine primary prevention of efforts and gender equality goals. In its extreme forms, backlash is hostile and can involve physical, sexual and online violence and threats of violence.	**Safety and security** • Put in place processes to ensure the safety and security of practitioners and advocates working on primary prevention. Sometimes this means <u>not</u> engaging with aggressive opponents of primary prevention of violence against women as engagement may lead to experiences of violence. • Create spaces where individuals and collectives who exhibit backlash are not amplified. • Re-centre the conversation around the goals of primary prevention of violence against women.

Understanding, monitoring and responding to resistance and backlash

Part 6 - Future opportunities

This research report contributes to the nascent body of evidence on resistance and backlash to gendered approaches to preventing violence against women by:

1. Building on previous conceptualisations of the different forms of resistance offered by Flood et al., (2018, 2020) and other scholars working in the areas of gender and organisations (Colley et al., 2020; Williamson 2019), feminist institutionalism (Mergaert and Lombardo 2014; Lombardo and Mergaert 2013), and resistance to diversity and inclusion more broadly (Plaut and Thomas 2008; Plaut et al., 2020).

2. Expanding the explanation of the eight different forms of resistance (denial, disavowal, inaction, appeasement, appropriation, co-option, repression and backlash) by using illustrative examples gathered through academic and grey literature as well as other forms of empirical evidence, from media reports, and informal conversations with gendered violence prevention stakeholders.

3. Creating a potential monitoring approach to support practitioners to better anticipate, understand and respond to resistance and backlash to primary prevention of violence against women initiatives and programs within organisations. This approach centres reflective practice and could be used and adapted to suit a range of settings.

4. Offering further strategies to minimise and respond to resistance to primary prevention of violence against women in institutional and organisational settings.

As detailed in this report, resistance and backlash to primary prevention of violence against women comes in many forms. It is primarily in reaction to activism, advocacy and interventions that challenge the kinds of entrenched beliefs, norms, values, practices and power structures that sustain the gendered drivers of violence. There is a spectrum of interconnected responses, ranging from more passive types of resistance to more active forms of resistance through to deliberate aggressive backlash.

At the passive end of the spectrum, resistance manifests in commonplace, everyday ways that may seem benign; however, they support the other end of the spectrum that can manifest in hostile, aggressive and violent ways that pose serious risks to people's safety. Addressing individual, organisational and institutional, and societal resistance and backlash to primary prevention of violence against women is vital to achieve prevention goals. This work needs to address both the more obvious forms of anti-feminist backlash *and* the more subtle but pervasive and insidious forms of resistance, such as denial, disavowal, co-option and so on that can greatly undermine prevention of violence against women efforts.

This project has highlighted several opportunities to continue building on this emerging and necessary body of research on resistance and backlash:

1. This research project has contributed to enhancing understandings of resistance and backlash and how it manifests, but

there is considerable scope to continue to expand on several areas. Some key opportunities include:

a. Further consideration and empirical research of institutional forms of resistance and backlash.

b. Greater engagement with campaigns and social media moderators to understand effective ways of responding to resistance and backlash online within the community and how to identify instances of deliberate and coordinated targeting of primary prevention campaigns by men's rights activists and other anti-feminist groups.

c. As discussed in Highlight Box 1 and 3, responses such as 'not all men', 'what about men' and 'men are victims too' to gendered approaches to violence prevention are common. There is an ongoing need to develop effective ways to address and counter such responses and to integrate these strategies into the planning of campaigns and interventions from the outset. This could include building on existing guidance and resources on framing primary prevention of violence against women with explicit aims to reduce resistance.

d. Expand on the proposed opposing actions/outcomes to the eight forms of resistance that have been developed here (Section 5.2.2), both conceptually and empirically.

2. The monitoring approach outlined in this report is preliminary – a

proposed approach that will be taken forward and refined over time. As a result:

a. There are opportunities to work with practitioners from various settings to implement, test, and refine the monitoring approach, in order to ground it in best practice. This may include the establishment of some common qualitative indicators to track resistance and backlash to primary prevention of violence against women.

b. Testing the monitoring approach in a range of settings such as workplaces, education settings and public sectors (e.g., local, state and federal government). This will both test the applicability and suitability of the monitoring approach and generate further empirical evidence of the forms and manifestations of resistance, which can be used to improve and refine the tool.

c. Testing the monitoring approach with different audiences, communities and population groups and as part a range of different gendered violence prevention efforts.

d. This testing may also potentially show how resistance adapts and changes across different levels and at different stages of primary prevention interventions in ways that continue to hinder primary prevention of violence against women efforts.

3. This report has offered nuanced examples and strategies identify, understand and respond to resistance. Components of these could be condensed and adapted to create easy-to-use practical resources for the violence prevention sector.

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