COMPANION BRIEF

PATHWAYS ASSOCIATED WITH VIOLENCE-SUPPORTIVE ATTITUDES

PURPOSE AND AUDIENCE

This brief explains insights from research examining how attitudes towards gender inequality, understanding of violence against women, and seeing violence as a local issue are linked with violence-supportive attitudes in Victoria. It provides a high-level summary of research findings and how they can be applied to inform prevention work in Victoria. A detailed technical report on analysis and outcomes can be found here.

PROJECT IN BRIEF

Respect Victoria analysed responses from the 2021 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey to explore how different attitudes are connected.

The analysis examined four areas:

- attitudes towards gender inequality
- understanding and recognition of violence against women
- acknowledgement that violence is a problem locally
- attitudes that minimise, excuse or support violence against women.

Among the factors examined, attitudes towards gender inequality had the strongest link with violence-supportive attitudes. Greater understanding of violence and greater acknowledgement that violence is a local issue were also linked with less violence-supportive attitudes.

These findings identify possible pathways for prevention and further testing. They do not show that one attitude causes another or that changing a single attitude will reduce violence.

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This brief is designed so readers can quickly find the level of detail most useful to them.

Methods and key figures: Provides a plain-language explanation of the data and statistical model, together with the strongest results from the technical paper.

Findings and implications at a glance: Pairs the five main findings with a short explanation of what they may mean for prevention.

Policy implications: Highlights considerations for policy, prevention infrastructure and coordinated action across settings.

Practice and communications implications: Translates the findings into considerations for programs, public communication and place-based prevention.

Research, monitoring and evaluation implications: Identifies priorities for future research, measurement and testing.

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NOTE ON LIMITATIONS

The findings describe associations in survey responses collected in 2021 during the COVID19 period. They do not measure current Victorian attitudes, show how attitudes change over time, or establish causal pathways, intervention effects or behaviour change. The model includes selected attitudes and demographic factors. It does not include every individual, social, economic or structural factor relevant to violence and its prevention.

METHODS AT A GLANCE

DATA

- 2021 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS)
- 6,143 Victorians aged 16 and over
- Weighted responses; 1,500 additional Victorian interviews funded by Respect Victoria

MEASURES

- **Attitudes towards gender inequality -** Beliefs about gender roles, women's leadership and autonomy, sexism, and whether gender inequality persists.
- **Understanding of violence against women -** Recognition of different forms of violence and understanding of its gendered nature.
- **Distancing -** Whether respondents agreed that violence against women is a problem in their suburb or town.
- **Violence-supportive attitudes -** Attitudes that minimise violence, mistrust women's accounts or objectify women.

ANALYSIS

Respect Victoria investigated connections between different attitudes measured by NCAS using structural equation modelling. This is a statistical method that examines several relationships at the same time. The model tested whether understanding violence and recognising it as a local issue accounted for part of the relationship between gender inequality and violence-supportive attitudes. Gender, age and occupation were also included in the analysis. The model shows patterns of association. It does not prove that one attitude causes another.

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KEY FINDINGS



Among the factors examined, attitudes towards gender inequality had the strongest association with violence-supportive attitudes.



Denying that gender inequality still exists had the strongest association among the gender-inequality measures, followed by support for rigid gender roles.



Greater understanding of the forms and gendered nature of violence was associated with less violence-supportive attitudes.



People with more gender-unequal attitudes were less likely to recognise violence as a problem in their own suburb or town. Lower local acknowledgement was also linked with more violence-supportive attitudes.

KEY FIGURES

57.5%

The full model accounted for 57.5% of the variation in violence-supportive attitude scores.

The remaining 42.5% was not accounted for by the model and may reflect other attitudes, experiences, norms and wider social or structural factors.

26%

did not agree that violence against women was a problem in their own suburb or town.

5%

did not agree that violence against women was a problem in Australia.

This gap suggests that some people may recognise violence as a national issue while seeing it as less relevant to their own community.

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WHAT WE FOUND

Broad support for equality and rejection of violence: The majority of Victorians do not hold violence-supportive attitudes and recognise the importance of gender equality, but harmful attitudes and limited community understanding are a barrier to progress.

Gender inequality had the strongest link: Among the factors included in the model, attitudes towards gender inequality had the strongest association with violence-supportive attitudes.

Understanding violence mattered, but was not the whole story: Victorians with a greater understanding of gendered violence are less likely to support or excuse it. Knowledge of what counts as violence (UVAWS) disrupts the link between inequality-endorsing beliefs and violence-supportive attitudes (AVAWS).

Distancing minimises violence and dilutes urgency: When people view violence against women as an issue affecting other communities rather than their own, it becomes easier for people to dismiss or ignore the prevalence of violence locally. This minimises the issue, dilutes the sense of urgency and need for action, and diffuses responsibility to act.

Complex gender differences: Men are more likely to distance and hold violence-supportive attitudes: However, women with inequality-endorsing beliefs, especially on private matters such as home duties, relationships and intimacy, are also more likely to minimise violence against women, even if they support gender equality in public domains such as work, politics, and society.

Gender equality key to reducing violencesupportive attitudes: The structural equation model (SEM) that considers attitudes towards gender inequality (AGIS), understanding of violence against women (UVAWS), distancing, and demographics confirms that tackling gender inequality is essential to reducing violence-supportive attitudes (AVAWS)

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WHAT THIS MEANS

Need to address inequality-endorsing beliefs at the heart of violence-supportive attitudes.
Attitudes that deny gender inequality and uphold rigid gender roles are strongly linked to violence-supportive views. This highlights the need to challenge these beliefs, ensuring that tackling gender inequality and working to improve violence-supportive attitudes across the board remains central to reducing violence against women. Effectively reducing these attitudes requires a coordinated approach that raises the salience of gender inequality, addresses structural drivers, and advances progress across all interrelated attitudes that inform acceptance of violence.

Community education is a protective factor.
Understanding the range and complexity of violence against women, and how gender and power sustain it, weakens the link between inequality-endorsing beliefs and violence-supportive attitudes. While education alone might not eliminate these attitudes, improving community awareness through local, place-based awareness campaigns will highlight how violence affects the local community, making the issue more immediate and relatable. Such campaigns may help reduce violence-supportive attitudes by emphasising the local impact of violence and bridging the gap between awareness and action.

Overt and subtle biases remain a barrier to progress.
While overt victim-blaming is becoming less acceptable in Victoria, subtler gender biases persist, reinforced through myths about violence and the value placed on traditional gender role. These beliefs reinforce rigid gender stereotypes, justify violence and undermine women's experiences.

Conflicting views behind closed doors continue to shape violence-supportive attitudes.
Some men and women may support gender equality in public domains, such as politics or in the workplace, but continue to value traditional gender roles in private settings, believing men should be dominant in the home and in intimate relationships. These inequality-endorsing beliefs contribute to violence-supportive attitudes and reflect the need to examine and address attitudes to gender inequality across both domains to reduce acceptance of violence against women.

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ABOUT THIS PAGE

This page considers how the findings from **'Pathways associated with violence-supportive attitudes'** can support and inform primary prevention policy. The implications combine the Victorian NCAS findings with established prevention evidence. They highlight areas for continued and future policy development and coordination.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

CONTINUE A FOCUS ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER INEQUALITY

Since violence will not be eliminated in a society that sees it as acceptable, multidimensional policy responses that address the broader attitudes and societal norms that block progress on attitudes to gender inequality are needed.

The strong relationship between inequality-endorsing attitudes and violence-supportive attitudes reinforces the value of policy levers that embed gender equality at every level of society.

CONTINUE MAKING INEQUALITY AND VIOLENCE VISIBLE

People who don't acknowledge persisting inequality are most likely to hold violence-supportive views. However, greater awareness of inequality and violence against women weakens this link, signalling the importance of policy responses that broaden recognition of all forms of gender inequality and gender-based violence. Public education, in particular, could serve as an essential buffer that reduces the strength of these harmful beliefs.

CONSIDER LOCALISED POLICY RESPONSES

Distancing — viewing violence as a problem that affects others, rather than one's own community — is linked to violence-supportive attitudes. To effectively disrupt this link, there is a need for localised policy responses and clear communications that make violence relevant to people where they live. Tailored messaging that presents violence as a local issue, rather than one that only affects distant or marginalised groups, could enhance efforts to reduce violence-supportive attitudes.

CONTINUE BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DOMAINS

Developing multidimensional policy responses to advancing and building support for gender equality across public systems and in private life. Since the endorsement of equality at work or in politics does not automatically translate into equitable attitudes in households and intimate relationships, policies that support progress in both spheres are needed to reduce violence-supportive attitudes.

Citation: Respect Victoria. Pathways associated with violence-supportive attitudes (Companion brief 02/2026). Melbourne: Respect Victoria; 2026.

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ABOUT THIS PAGE

This page identifies ways that the findings from **'Pathways associated with violence-supportive attitudes'** can help sharpen primary prevention messages and program design and implementation. The research points to promising areas for development and testing, but does not discuss approaches that are already proven to be effective.

PRIMARY PREVENTION IMPLICATIONS

CONTINUE TO ADDRESS INEQUALITY ENDORSING ATTITUDES

Attitudes to gender equality have a significant influence on attitudes toward violence against women. This confirms that primary prevention efforts to reduce gender inequality and the attitudes that maintain it are central to addressing the underlying biases that sustain violence against women.

This reinforces the importance of challenging deeply held beliefs (held by a minority with entrenched inequality-endorsing attitudes) to reduce acceptance of violence against women.

CONTINUE BUILDING COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING

The importance of making persisting gender inequality visible and tangible is underscored by the fact that people with lower awareness of persisting gender inequality and violence against women are more likely to hold violence-supportive attitudes. This confirmation that limited understanding strengthens violence-supportive attitudes aligns with programmatic approaches aimed at increasing community understanding of violence in all its forms, including non-physical violence such as coercive control and technology-facilitated abuse.

CONSIDER LOCALISING PREVENTION EFFORTS

Building recognition of violence in people's immediate community, including non-physical forms of violence, will mitigate minimisation and acceptance of violence against women.

There is an opportunity to address 'distancing' (believing violence is a problem elsewhere) and make violence an immediate concern for individuals by emphasising its local impact, building issue salience across suburbs, towns and communities.

CONTINUE WORKING ACROSS PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SPHERES

Violence-supportive views are grounded in inequality-endorsing beliefs across all settings. However, NCAS shows that support for equality in public does not reliably translate into equitable attitudes in private. It is therefore important to prioritise primary prevention efforts in public settings (workplaces, schools, civic life) and private settings (households, intimate relationships, domestic gender roles).

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ABOUT THIS PAGE

This page outlines how findings from **'Pathways associated with violence-supportive attitudes'** could strengthen measurement, evaluation and future research. The analysis identifies beliefs worth examining more closely, but does not show how attitudes change over time, what causes change, or how attitudes affect behaviour

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

CONTINUE EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF INEQUALITY ENDORSING ATTITUDES

Attitudes denying or minimising gender inequality are the strongest predictors of violence-supportive attitudes.

This confirms the importance of robust research exploring how inequality-endorsing attitudes are formed and sustained, and evaluating which levers are most effective in disrupting those pathways.

CONSIDER COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR

Improving community understanding and awareness is a protective factor that weakens, though does not entirely sever, the link between inequality-endorsing attitudes and violence-supportive attitudes. As individuals who endorse gender inequality are more likely to have a limited understanding of violence against women, there is an opportunity to measure and reinforce the value of community education and awareness building as a protective factor against violence-supportive attitudes.

CONTINUE DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN SUPPORT IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DOMAINS

When measuring and tracking shifts in attitudes to gender equality, researchers could consider looking more closely at where support in public and private domains aligns and diverges. As support for gender equality in public does not guarantee support in private, researchers could examine how each domain relates to violence-supportive attitudes to inform interventions that address both spheres.

CONSIDER THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF LOCALISATION

Reducing the perception that violence happens elsewhere and to other people is important. Encouraging people to recognise violence as a local issue may buffer — but not completely counteract — the influence of patriarchal attitudes on violencesupportive beliefs. Further research could measure the impact on violence-supportive attitudes when distancing is reduced and potentially reveal a stronger mediating effect between recognition of violence (of all forms) as a local issue and decreased violence-supportive attitudes.

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