RESPECT VICTORIA

Pathways associated with violence-supportive attitudes: Modelling Victorians' understanding, attitudes and misconceptions about gender inequality and violence against women

ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings from structural equation modelling of weighted 2021 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) data for Victoria. It examines associations among attitudes towards gender inequality, understanding of violence against women, psychological distancing and violence-supportive attitudes. Among the variables included in the model, attitudes towards gender inequality had the strongest association with violence-supportive attitudes. Within the gender-inequality subscales, denying that gender inequality exists and endorsing rigid gender roles showed the strongest associations with violence-supportive attitudes.

Greater understanding of different forms of violence against women was associated with a weaker, but still substantial, relationship between gender-inequality attitudes and violence-supportive attitudes. People with more gender-unequal attitudes were also more likely to distance themselves from the issue by viewing violence as something that affects other communities or happens elsewhere. The Distancing variable was reverse-coded, so higher scores indicate greater acknowledgement that violence is a problem locally and therefore less psychological distance.

Together, these findings are consistent with the importance of both (a) shifting attitudes that endorse gender inequality, especially denial of inequality, and (b) improving community understanding of violence against women. They also identify psychological distancing – perceiving violence as happening 'somewhere else' – as a potentially important and under-examined barrier to attitude change. As the analysis is cross-sectional, it does not establish causal pathways or show that changing any one attitude will reduce violence. Rather, the findings support further testing of integrated gender equality, violence-literacy and place-based prevention approaches.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY AND ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

Respect Victoria acknowledges Aboriginal peoples throughout Victoria as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waterways. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present. We proudly acknowledge the Aboriginal communities throughout Victoria and their ongoing strength in being the world's oldest living cultures. We acknowledge the significant and ongoing impacts of colonisation and commit to working alongside First Nations communities to effect change. We recognise the ongoing leadership role of these communities in addressing and preventing family violence and violence against women and will continue to work in collaboration with First Peoples to eliminate these forms of violence from all communities.

VICTIM SURVIVOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Respect Victoria acknowledges the significant impact of family violence and violence against women on individuals, families and communities, and the strength, trauma and resilience of the children, young people and adults who have, and are still, experiencing this violence. We pay our respects to those whose lives were taken and to their family members and friends. We keep at the forefront in our minds all those who have experienced family violence or other forms of abuse, and for whom we undertake this work.

ANROWS

Respect Victoria acknowledges Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) as the owner of the 2021 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) and data derived from the 2021 NCAS. The findings and views expressed in this report cannot be attributed to ANROWS.

CONTRIBUTORS

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OVERVIEW

Attitudes that minimise violence against women, mistrust women's accounts of violence, and objectify women form part of the community context in which violence against women may be excused, minimised or treated as acceptable (1–3). Building knowledge about how these 'violence-supportive' attitudes are associated with other attitudes, and how they may change, is an important component of primary prevention efforts in Victoria. Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) conducts the National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) every four years. The NCAS is a national population-level survey that measures trends in violence-supportive attitudes over time and provides an opportunity to examine relationships among interrelated attitudinal dimensions. Respect Victoria commissioned a boosted state-level representative sample in 2021 to allow for deeper examination of factors associated with violence-supportive attitudes in Victoria.

This work aimed to develop and test a conceptual model of associations among attitudes towards gender inequality, understanding of violence against women, psychological distancing and violence-supportive attitudes in Victoria. It does not model violence perpetration, victimisation or prevalence. This technical paper is intended primarily for research, evaluation and policy-analysis audiences; companion evidence and implications briefs translate its main findings for broader policy and primary prevention audiences.

SCALES AND MEASUREMENT

The NCAS contains three main scales: the Attitudes towards Violence against Women Scale (AVAWS), the Attitudes towards Gender Inequality Scale (AGIS), and the Understanding of Violence against Women Scale (UVAWS). Each of these scales contains multiple subscales, as listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Scales, subscales and measurement guide for variables used in this analysis

NCAS 2021 scale	What it measures	Subscales	Number of items	Item structure	Response options	Direction of measurement
Attitudes towards Violence against Women (AVAWS)	Violence-supportive attitudes	Minimise Violence Mistrust Women Objectify Women	43	1–5 Likert scale	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree	Higher scores = less violence-supportive attitudes
Attitudes towards Gender Inequality (AGIS)	Patriarchal attitudes	Reinforce Gender Roles Undermine Leadership Limit Autonomy	17	1–5 Likert scale	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree	Higher scores = less endorsement of gender inequality (more gender-equal attitudes)

NCAS 2021 scale	What it measures	Subscales	Number of items	Item structure	Response options	Direction of measurement
		Normalise Sexism Deny Inequality			Strongly disagree	
Understanding of Violence against Women (UVAWS)	Community understanding	Recognise Domestic Violence Recognise Violence against Women Understand Gendered Domestic Violence (DV)	19	Is [X] a form of violence? 'Who is more likely to commit domestic violence?'	Yes, always Yes, usually Yes, sometimes No **Response options:** Men Women Both equally Unsure	Higher scores = more understanding of understanding and recognising all forms of violence against women
Violence against women is a problem in the suburb or town where I live	Distancing	N/A	1	1–5 Likert scale	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree	Higher scores = greater acknowledgement that violence is a local problem **(reverse-coded; less psychological distance)**

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The first stage of developing a conceptual model of associations with violence-supportive attitudes was to map relevant concepts and previous research onto the NCAS scales and subscales. This section provides the rationale for including the NCAS scales in the model and sets out the research questions and the theoretically proposed directions of association.

VIOLENCE-SUPPORTIVE ATTITUDES

The NCAS scale that measures violence-supportive attitudes is the Attitudes towards Violence against Women Scale (AVAWS). Widespread adoption of attitudes that accept, endorse or condone violence against women have been associated with higher perpetration of violence (4). One review found that communities with higher levels of justification of intimate partner violence also have higher rates of prevalence. The review authors conclude that potential perpetrators are more likely to feel justified in committing violence when it is socially condoned (5).

Extant evidence suggests that while gender norms and inequality do not solely determine the prevalence of violence, they 'operate through long causal chains, interacting dynamically and in complex ways across the social ecology' (6). To the extent that attitudes are representations that maintain gendered relations, when individuals internalise and enact their own attitudes and those of their community (7), challenging harmful attitudes is a key strategy in the prevention of violence against women.

Primary prevention initiatives can target attitudes that normalise or justify violence to dismantle the social acceptability of such behaviour. Public education campaigns, community-based interventions and school programs that challenge these attitudes operate through a theory of change in which reducing social tolerance for violence contributes to prevention alongside changes to social norms, structures, behaviours and material conditions. Tracking attitudes over time with surveys such as the NCAS enables policymakers to monitor population-level change and make data-informed decisions about how to strengthen interventions (1, 2).

The established relationship between violence-supportive attitudes and perpetration supports the inclusion of AVAWS as the attitudinal outcome in the conceptual model. AVAWS does not measure violence perpetration, victimisation or prevalence. Examining relationships among the measured attitudes may shed light on potential pathways for holistic attitude change.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER INEQUALITY

The NCAS scale that measures attitudes endorsing gender inequality is the Attitudes towards Gender Inequality Scale (AGIS). Previous studies, including those using NCAS data, have found a strong association between attitudes endorsing gender inequality and attitudes towards violence against women (i.e., AVAWS), above demographic factors such as age or education (2, 8). This supports the inclusion of the AGIS as the main predictor of AVAWS scores in the current statistical model and is consistent with primary prevention frameworks that position gender inequality as a key driver of violence against women. The present analysis tests associations with violence-supportive attitudes; it does not test whether changing AGIS scores will reduce the prevalence of violence. Efforts to shift beliefs around gender roles and inequality may nevertheless contribute to reducing attitudes that endorse violence.

Over the past four decades, beliefs that overtly blame women for violence have become less publicly acceptable, as societal awareness of the issue has grown (4). However, more subtle forms of gender bias persist, often manifesting through myths about violence and ambivalent sexist attitudes. These myths are closely related to the endorsement of rigid gender stereotypes, reinforcing harmful beliefs about the roles

of men and women in society, and legitimising violence against women in certain circumstances (6). Primary prevention efforts therefore must not only target violence-supportive attitudes but also address underlying (and sometimes less blatant) attitudes that justify violence.

- **Research Question 1:** Do attitudes towards gender inequality (AGIS) predict attitudes towards violence against women (AVAWS)?

DIMENSIONS OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER INEQUALITY

Previous research has pinpointed specific dimensions of gender inequality that contribute to persistent violence-supportive attitudes (7). Regression analysis of NCAS data at the national level has found those who support limiting women's autonomy in private are more likely to endorse the use of violence against women (7). Attitudes that support men's dominance within intimate relationships, including the belief that men have the right to enforce their dominance, legitimise violence against women and thereby perpetuate it (9).

This previous research highlights the need for separate analyses of attitudes toward gender inequality in (a) public and (b) private domains. Doing so enables research to better understand the distinct influences from each domain on attitudes supportive of violence against women. Examining how subscales of the AGIS differentially predict violence-supportive attitudes can identify specific attitudes that underpin support for violence in the Victorian context.

While some individuals may support gender equality in the public domain – such as endorsing women's participation in politics or the workforce – they may simultaneously reject gender equality within the private domain, believing that men should maintain control over household and intimate relationships. Understanding this discrepancy requires a multidimensional approach to gender equality that distinguishes between public and private domains.

Research suggests that individuals who endorse traditional gender roles in the private sphere are more likely to support violence against women, even if they support gender equality in public life (9). For instance, some studies indicate that women with higher economic status relative to their partners may be at even greater risk of intimate partner violence, particularly if their partners hold traditional beliefs about gender roles (9). This backlash effect underscores the complexity of gender relations, where increased gender equality can provoke negative responses. Therefore, this analysis includes attitudes towards gender inequality in both the public and private spheres.

- **Research Question 1a:** Will subscales of AGIS (Reinforce Gender Roles; Undermine Leadership; Limit Autonomy; Normalise Sexism; Deny Inequality) differentially predict AVAWS?

GENDER DIFFERENCE IN VIOLENCE-SUPPORTIVE ATTITUDES

Gender has been found to predict violence-supportive attitudes, with men more likely than women to agree with myths and beliefs that minimise or justify violence against women (3). This includes perceiving a narrower range of behaviours as violent, showing less empathy for people who have experienced violence, blaming them more readily, and downplaying the seriousness of physical and sexual assault. Men are also less likely to see behaviours constituting violence against women as serious, inappropriate or damaging, reflecting how traditional gender-role attitudes shape perceptions of violence (3).

Other studies challenge the assumption that gender alone is the strongest predictor of violence-supportive attitudes. For example, the correlation between being male and scoring highly on the VSA-18 Scale, which measures attitudes supportive of violence against women, was found in one study to be weaker than the correlation with other factors, such as education, age and occupation (10).

However, these studies analyse the unique statistical association of gender with violence-supportive attitudes, rather than whether gender changes the strength of the relationship between patriarchal attitudes and violence-supportive attitudes. This paper therefore tests gender as a moderator of the AGIS–AVAWS association.

Gender is included as a moderating variable in the conceptual model, proposing that it may change the strength of the relationship between attitudes towards gender inequality and attitudes towards violence against women. Understanding whether this association differs by gender may inform hypotheses for cohort-based interventions.

- **Research Question 1b**: Does gender (identifying as a man compared to identifying as a woman or non-binary person) moderate the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS?

COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING AND RECOGNITION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

On the basis of this theoretical argument, and because community education to increase recognition of violence is a core component of primary prevention, the Understanding of Violence against Women Scale (UVAWS) is included as a central variable in the conceptual model. Specifically, the model tests whether community understanding accounts for part of the association between patriarchal attitudes and violence-supportive attitudes.

Recognising intimate partner violence as a form of abuse is crucial, not only for people who have experienced violence to seek help and perpetrators to engage in treatment, but also for creating a community capable of effectively responding to and preventing further violence (8). ‘Community understanding’ can constitute recognition of specific behaviours that constitute domestic violence, sexual violence and technology-facilitated abuse, along with understanding of how violence is shaped by contextual factors such as gender (2).

There is limited research directly examining how community understanding relates to violence-supportive attitudes, but a strong theoretical rationale for including it. We hypothesise that lower understanding will be associated with a stronger relationship between patriarchal attitudes and violence-supportive attitudes, while higher understanding will be associated with attenuation of that relationship. Put another way, recognition and understanding may influence whether violence is condemned, minimised or excused.

- **Research Question 2**: Does understanding of violence against women and its gendered nature (UVAWS) mediate the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS?

DENIAL OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ONE’S OWN COMMUNITY (‘DISTANCING’)

The 2021 NCAS found that 25.6% of Victorians deny that violence is a problem in the suburb or town where they live, but only 5.4% deny that violence is a problem in Australia (2). This gap is consistent with the possibility that some Victorians see violence as a national problem but as less relevant to their own communities.

When violence occurs within their own communities, individuals are more likely to explain it through external factors, such as personal circumstances, rather than acknowledging it as a widespread or systemic issue. In contrast, violence occurring in outgroups is more likely to be attributed to internal, cultural flaws (11). This dynamic is evident when individuals from privileged, often white or economically stable communities, may believe that ‘people like us’ do not perpetrate violence, and thus, it is not a problem in their community.

Psychological distance from violence against women may be associated with violence-supportive attitudes. When individuals view violence as a problem that occurs elsewhere but not in their own communities, the problem is externalised and creates distance from both violence and action against it.

One study found that when people view a person experiencing intimate partner violence as less 'human' (manipulated experimentally by describing the person who has experienced violence as unfaithful), and measured on a scale of perceived humanness, they are less likely to offer help and support to that person (12). Similarly, perpetrators often employ psychological processes such as denial of responsibility and victim-blaming, which are reinforced by cultural discourses that shift blame away from men, particularly within patriarchal frameworks (13).

In a broader context, cultural framings of violence against women often characterise perpetrators as 'outsiders' (those from foreign cultures) and nonviolent 'insiders' (those within the dominant cultural group). For instance, in analyses of European Union policies, violence is frequently depicted as an issue stemming from immigrant or ethnic minority communities, neglecting the role of structural gender inequality in perpetuating violence within the majority culture (14). This framing marginalises vulnerable groups, particularly ethnic minority and migrant women, and undermines the seriousness of forms of violence that occur within majority populations (14).

The process of distancing is not limited to cultural or ethnic dimensions. Discussions about rural intimate partner violence, for instance, often reinforce stereotypes of rural communities as deviant or dangerous, which can further marginalise rural people experiencing partner violence (15). Such narratives suggest that violence is an issue of 'other' people or places, reinforcing the belief that violence is absent from one's own community. Media representations also contribute to this dynamic, often framing domestic violence in Western countries as isolated incidents, while attributing violence in non-Western societies to cultural causes, particularly in Islamic communities (16).

Distancing attitudes may also arise from narrow definitions of violence. Individuals who define violence strictly in terms of physical harm may be unaware of or dismiss the prevalence of other forms of abuse, such as emotional, economic or psychological violence. This could contribute to a perception that violence is not occurring locally, reinforcing complacency and inaction. The conceptual model therefore tests the association between community understanding and Distancing, and whether Distancing accounts for part of the AGIS–AVAWS association.

- **Research Question 3**: Does believing violence against women is not a problem where you live (Distancing) mediate the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS?
- **Research Question 4**: Are UVAWS and Distancing associated with each other?

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATTITUDES

This paper examines theoretically proposed pathways associated with violence-supportive attitudes. It is expected that patriarchal attitudes – a cluster of attitudes including upholding rigid gender roles and norms, undermining the public leadership of women, limiting women's autonomy in private, normalising sexism and denying inequality – will have the strongest association with violence-supportive attitudes that minimise violence against women, mistrust women's accounts of experiencing violence, and objectify women. It is also expected that community understanding of violence – including recognition of domestic violence, stalking and technology-facilitated abuse, and understanding of the gendered nature of violence – will account for part of the AGIS–AVAWS relationship. Higher levels of community understanding and recognition of violence are expected to be associated with a weaker relationship between patriarchal attitudes and violence-supportive attitudes. These hypotheses concern associations between attitude measures, not causal effects on violence.

- **Research Question 5:** How much variation in attitudes towards violence against women is accounted for by the full structural equation model?

STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELLING

Structural equation modelling (SEM) is a multivariate statistical analysis technique that tests multiple structural relationships simultaneously. It allows direct associations, interactions and indirect pathways to be estimated within a single model.

SEM is used here to test a theoretically specified directional model of how attitudes supporting gender inequality relate to violence-supportive attitudes, including indirect pathways via violence understanding and local acknowledgement. Because the data are cross-sectional and observational, the model cannot establish temporal order or fully rule out unmeasured confounding, and causal interpretations are treated as provisional and consistent with, rather than definitive proof of, the proposed pathways. All models incorporated NCAS survey weights. AGIS, AVAWS and UVAWS were entered as observed composite scale scores rather than estimated as latent variables.

VARIABLE SELECTION

Across the NCAS scales used here, higher scores indicate less endorsement of harmful attitudes: higher AVAWS scores indicate less violence-supportive attitudes, and higher AGIS scores indicate less endorsement of gender inequality (more gender-equal attitudes). Higher UVAWS scores indicate stronger recognition and understanding of violence against women.

There are five subscales underlying AGIS:

- Reinforce Gender Roles
- Undermine Leadership
- Limit Autonomy
- Normalise Sexism
- Deny Inequality.

The Limit Autonomy subscale pertains to the private sphere and Undermining Leadership the public sphere – these act as proxy variables for public/private inequality.

The AVAWS was selected as the dependent variable to examine which measured attitudes are associated with higher or lower AVAWS scores and identify possible pathways for further testing in prevention research. There are three main subscales underlying AVAWS:

- Minimise Violence
- Mistrust Women
- Objectify Women.

Within AVAWS, items can pertain to either domestic violence, sexual violence (including sexual assault and sexual harassment) or technology-facilitated abuse.

The UVAWS measures awareness and understanding of what constitutes violence against women – including physical, emotional and financial abuse – and understanding of the gendered nature of violence.

An attitude reflecting ‘distancing’ is measured by a single item that assesses the extent to which someone believes violence is a problem where they live. The Distancing variable was reverse-coded so higher scores indicate greater acknowledgement that violence is a local problem (that is, lower psychological distance).

The existing scales, subscales and the items comprising them have been maintained in this analysis as they have been validated by ANROWS.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND RESULTS

This section presents the conceptual model in stages, based on the research questions developed from the literature review and hypotheses generated from each research question (Table 2).

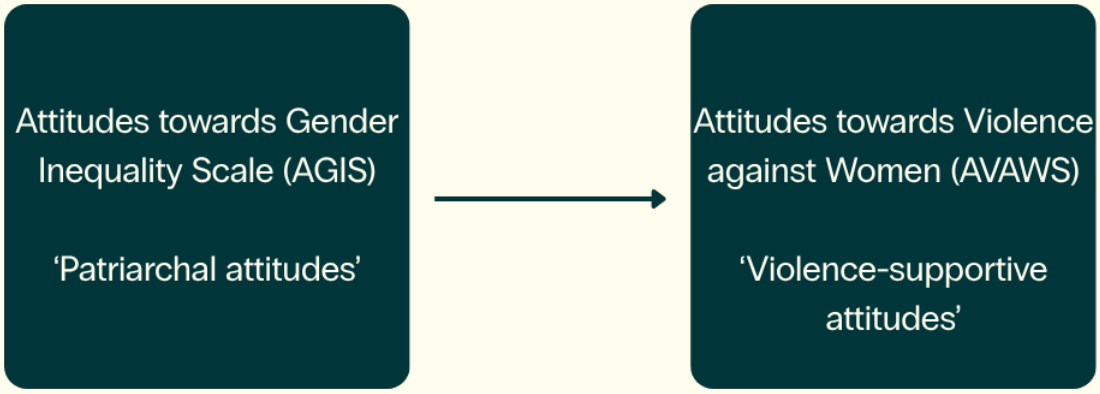
Table 2. The research questions and associated hypotheses

Research questions	Hypotheses
1: Do attitudes towards gender inequality (AGIS) predict attitudes towards violence against women (AVAWS)?	1: Higher AGIS will predict higher AVAWS.
1a: Will subscales of AGIS (Reinforce Gender Roles; Undermine Leadership; Limit Autonomy; Normalise Sexism; Deny Inequality) differentially predict AVAWS?	1a: Subscales of AGIS will differentially predict AVAWS, with private AGIS (Limit Autonomy) having a stronger relationship with AVAWS than public AGIS (Undermine Leadership).
1b: Does gender (identifying as a man compared to identifying as a woman or non-binary person) moderate the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS?	1b: Gender will moderate the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS, with the relationship being stronger for men than for women.
2: Does UVAWS mediate the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS?	2: UVAWS will mediate the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS, with high UVAWS eliminating the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS. That is, the association between AGIS and AVAWS is dependent on a person's understanding of violence against women.
3: Does believing violence against women is not a problem where you live (Distancing) mediate the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS?	3: Distancing will mediate the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS, with greater degrees of Distancing reducing the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS. That is, the association between AGIS and AVAWS is dependent on a person believing violence is a problem where they live.
4: Are UVAWS and Distancing associated with each other?	4: UVAWS and Distancing will be associated with each other, with lower acknowledgment that violence against women is a problem where people live being associated with lower understanding and knowledge of violence against women and its gendered nature.
5: How much variation in attitudes towards violence against women is accounted for by the full structural equation model?	5: With all variables entered into the structural equation model, the individual relationships identified above will largely persist, and the full conceptual model will account for a high proportion of variance in attitudes towards violence against women in Victoria.

RQ1: DO ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER INEQUALITY (AGIS) PREDICT ATTITUDES TOWARDS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (AVAWS)?

Based on previous research, including analysis of NCAS data, we predict a direct association between attitudes supporting or endorsing gender inequality and attitudes supporting or endorsing violence against women. We expect this association to be strong, with more gender-equal AGIS scores associated with less violence-supportive AVAWS scores.

Figure 1. The expected direction of influence



Hypothesis 1: Higher AGIS will predict higher AVAWS

Results: The data support the hypothesis.

Table 3 and Figure 2 present the results of the structural equation model. Higher scores on the AGIS predict higher scores on the AVAWS. The regression estimate of 0.675 (Table 3) indicates a positive, moderately strong relationship between AGIS and AVAWS. For each one-unit increase in AGIS (more gender-equal attitudes), AVAWS increases by 0.675 units (less violence-supportive attitudes). Conversely, lower AGIS scores are associated with lower AVAWS scores (more violence-supportive attitudes).

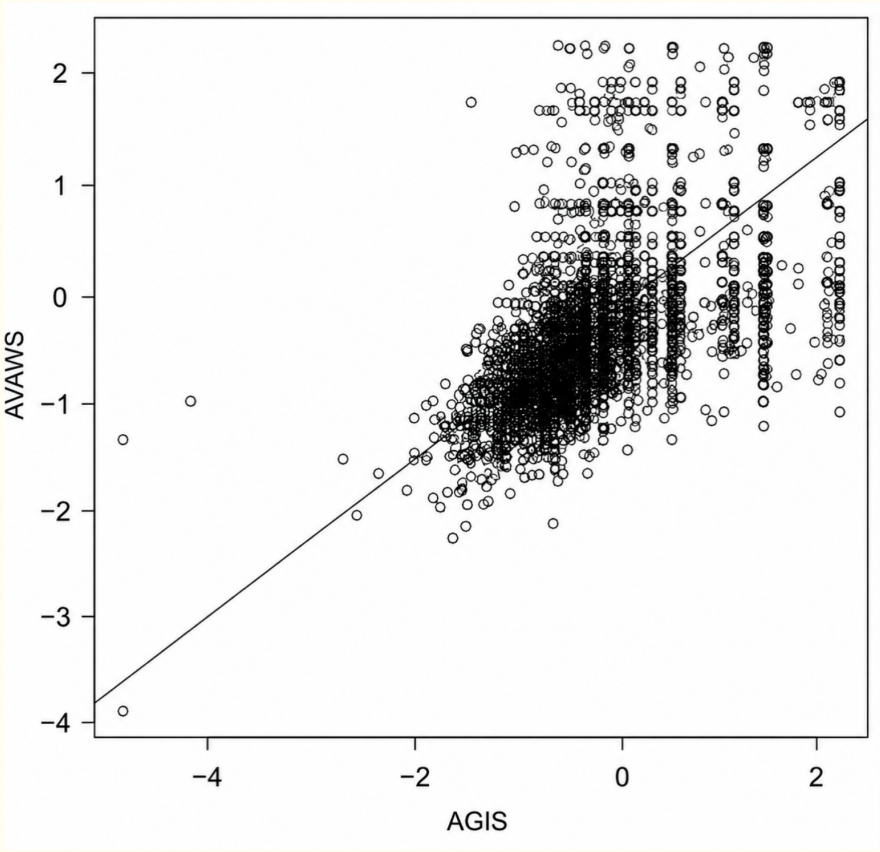
Table 3. SEM predicting AVAWS from AGIS

Type	Outcome	Predictor	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(>|z|)	ci.lower	ci.upper	Std.lv	Std.all
Regression	AVAWS	AGIS	0.675	0.016	43.243	0.000	0.644	0.705	0.675	0.689
Intercept	AVAWS	–	−0.045	0.013	−3.556	0.000	−0.069	−0.020	−0.045	−0.046

Note. Std.Err = standard error; P(>|z|) = p-value; ci.lower/ci.upper = 95% confidence interval bounds; Std.lv = latent variable standardised estimate; Std.all = fully standardised estimate.

Figure 2 depicts a scatter plot of all participants' scores on AGIS and AVAWS. There is variation across the sample, but it visualises the positive relationship between AGIS and AVAWS (higher AGIS is associated with higher AVAWS). This result is in line with Webster (10), and we will expand on these previous findings by adding additional variables to the model to see if this decreases the strength of the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS.

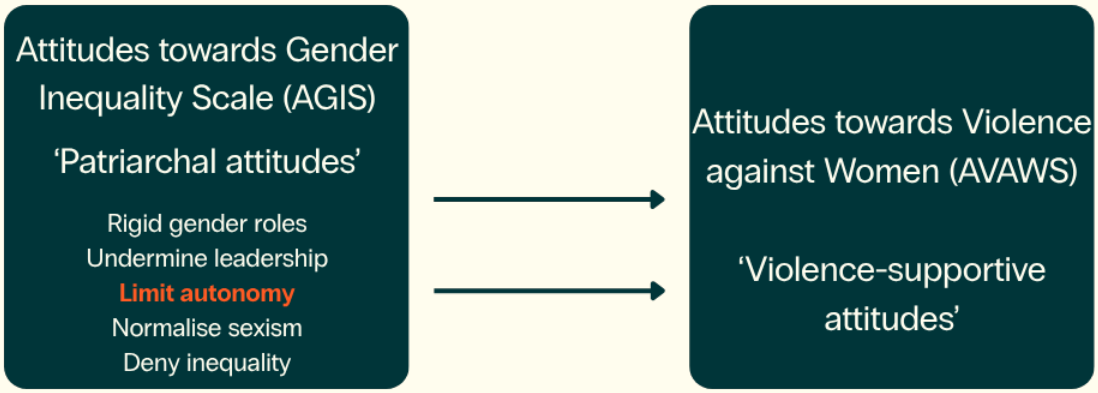
Figure 2. Scatter plot of participant scores on AGIS and AVAWS



RQ1A: WILL SUBSCALES OF AGIS (REINFORCE GENDER ROLES; UNDERMINE LEADERSHIP; LIMIT AUTONOMY; NORMALISE SEXISM; DENY INEQUALITY) DIFFERENTIALLY PREDICT AVAWS?

We predict that the AGIS subscales related to the private sphere will have a stronger relationship to violence-supportive attitudes than those subscales related to the public sphere.

Figure 3. Depiction of conceptual relationship between subscales of AGIS and overall AVAWS



Subscales of AGIS will differentially predict AVAWS, with private AGIS (Limit Autonomy) having a stronger relationship with AVAWS than public AGIS (Undermine Leadership).

Results: The data partially support the hypothesis.

Table 4 presents the results of the structural equation model, showing that AGIS subscales do differentially predict AVAWS, with Deny Inequality having the strongest relationship with AVAWS (followed by Reinforce Gender Roles). This model predicts 43.1% of the variance in AVAWS, meaning 56.9% of the variance in AVAWS is explained by factors not measured in this model or otherwise unknown.

Table 4. SEM showing that AGIS subscales differentially predict AVAWS

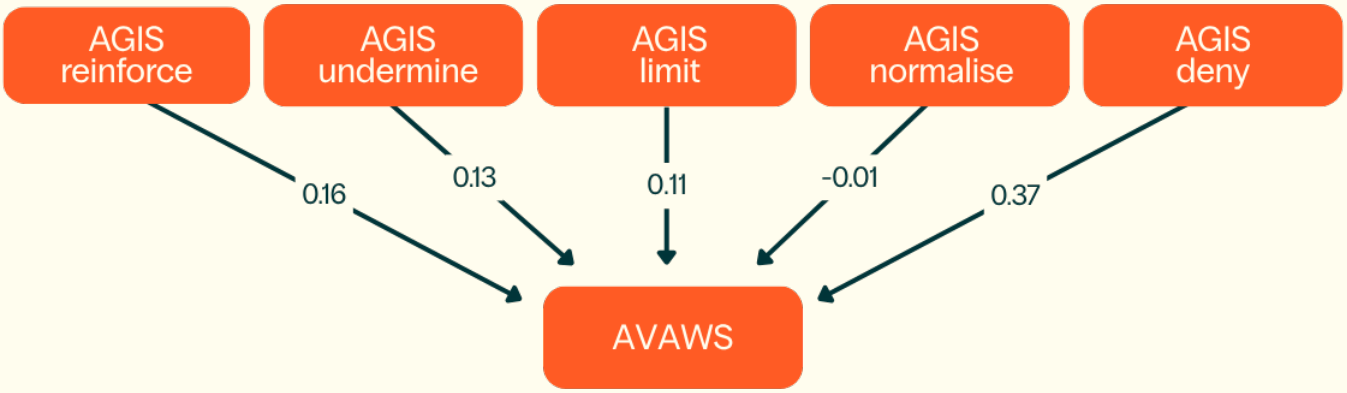
Type	Outcome	Predictor	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(>|z|)	ci.lower	ci.upper	Std.lv	Std.all
Regression	AVAWS	AGIS reinforce	0.162	0.020	8.200	0.000	0.123	0.201	0.162	0.186
Regression	AVAWS	AGIS undermine	0.129	0.018	7.076	0.000	0.094	0.165	0.129	0.149
Regression	AVAWS	AGIS limit	0.115	0.018	6.281	0.000	0.079	0.150	0.115	0.125
Regression	AVAWS	AGIS normalise	–0.015	0.019	–0.766	0.444	–0.052	0.023	–0.015	–0.016
Regression	AVAWS	AGIS deny	0.371	0.023	16.051	0.000	0.325	0.416	0.371	0.399
Intercept	AVAWS	–	–0.116	0.017	–6.776	0.000	–0.150	–0.083	–0.116	–0.123

The Deny Inequality estimate of 0.371 indicates a positive and moderately strong relationship between this subscale and AVAWS. Interpreted in the direction of the scale, higher scores on Deny Inequality (greater acknowledgement that gender inequality exists) are associated with higher AVAWS scores (less violence-supportive attitudes). This suggests that reducing denial of inequality is a promising leverage point for reducing violence-supportive attitudes.

Figure 4 presents the path diagram for the SEM testing Hypothesis 1a. The path coefficients indicate that private- and public-sphere AGIS attitudes (Limit Autonomy and Undermine Leadership, respectively) are similarly and significantly associated with AVAWS scores ($\beta = 0.11$ and $\beta = 0.13$, respectively). These findings suggest that stronger endorsement of gender-inequitable attitudes in the public sphere is associated with slightly higher AVAWS scores than stronger endorsement of gender-inequitable attitudes in the private sphere.

Normalise Sexism does not have a significant path coefficient associated with AVAWS scores in Victoria, an interesting finding given it comprises a core theoretical component of the measurement of AVAWS, and in contrast with findings by Webster, Ward, Diemer and colleagues (7), in which it was the third most highly associated AGIS subscale predicting AVAWS in a regression model (this subscale is called ‘Hostility to Women’ in previous iterations of the NCAS).

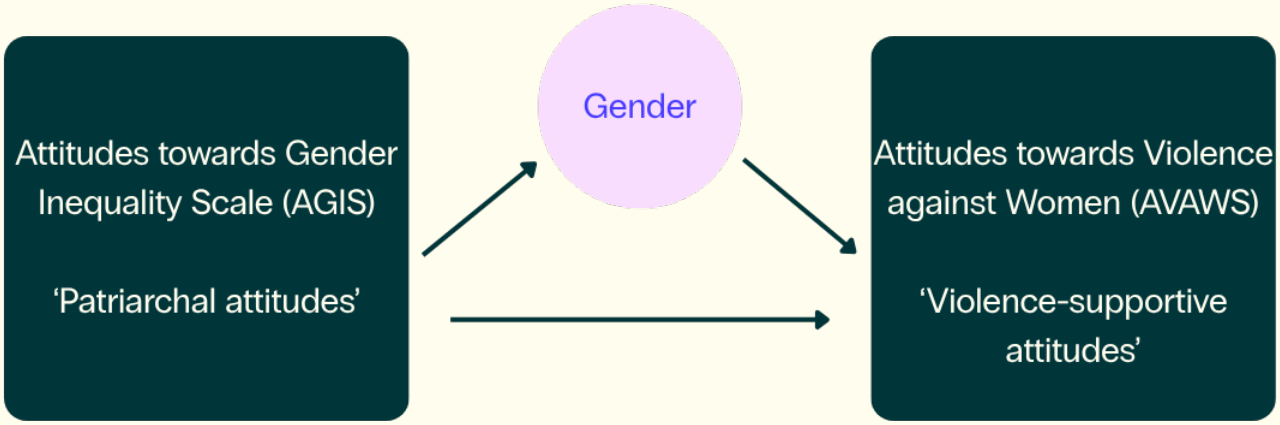
Figure 4. The path diagram for the SEM testing Hypothesis 1a



RQ1B: DOES GENDER (IDENTIFYING AS A MAN COMPARED TO BEING A WOMAN OR NON-BINARY PERSON) MODERATE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGIS AND AVAWS?

We predict that gender will moderate the relationship between AGIS (patriarchal attitudes) and AVAWS (violence-supportive attitudes).

Figure 5. It is expected that gender will moderate the relationship between patriarchal attitudes and violence-supportive attitudes



Hypothesis 1b: Gender will moderate the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS, with the relationship being stronger for men than for women.

Results: The hypothesis is partially confirmed.

To test this hypothesis, we first use simple regression (via SEM) to confirm that there is a gender difference in AVAWS scores. In Table 5, we see that being male is notably associated with lower AVAWS scores than being a woman or non-binary (though the variance explained is only 3.1%).

Table 6 presents the AGIS–AVAWS relationship for men, and Table 7 presents the AGIS–AVAWS relationship for women and non-binary people. Table 8 presents a structural equation model that includes the interaction between AGIS and being male, with evidence of gender having a moderating effect.

However, we found that the coefficient for women/non-binary participants (0.706) is slightly higher than that for men (0.623). Based on these coefficients, the hypothesis that the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS would be stronger for men than women is not supported.

Women and non-binary people who hold higher AGIS scores (endorsing gender equality) are more likely to also have higher AVAWS scores (less endorsement of violence-supportive attitudes). Put another way, the AGIS–AVAWS association is slightly weaker for men than for women and non-binary people in this reduced model.

Table 5. AGIS–AVAWS relationship with regression coefficients

Type	Outcome	Predictor	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(>|z|)	ci.lower	ci.upper	Std.lv	Std.all
Regression	AVAWS	Men	–0.339	0.032	–10.710	0.000	–0.402	–0.277	–0.339	–0.175
Intercept	AVAWS	–	0.033	0.024	1.404	0.160	–0.013	0.079	0.033	0.034

Table 6. The AGIS–AVAWS relationship for men

Type	Outcome	Predictor	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(>|z|)	ci.lower	ci.upper	Std.lv	Std.all
Regression	AVAWS	AGIS (b1)	0.623	0.027	23.217	0.000	0.571	0.676	0.623	0.678
Intercept	AVAWS	(b0)	–0.086	0.020	–4.235	0.000	–0.126	–0.046	–0.086	–0.101

Table 7. The AGIS–AVAWS relationship for women and non-binary people

Type	Outcome	Predictor	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(>|z|)	ci.lower	ci.upper	Std.lv	Std.all
Regression	AVAWS	AGIS (b1)	0.706	0.018	38.598	0.000	0.670	0.742	0.706	0.679
Intercept	AVAWS	(b0)	–0.026	0.017	–1.529	0.126	–0.059	0.007	–0.026	–0.025

Table 8. SEM results including the interaction between AGIS and men

Type	Outcome	Predictor	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(>|z|)	ci.lower	ci.upper	Std.lv	Std.all
Regression	AVAWS	AGIS (b1)	0.706	0.018	38.598	0.000	0.670	0.742	0.706	0.721
Regression	AVAWS	Male (b2)	–0.060	0.026	–2.291	0.022	–0.112	–0.009	–0.060	–0.031
Regression	AVAWS	Male AGIS (b3)	–0.083	0.032	–2.552	0.011	–0.147	–0.019	–0.083	–0.057
Intercept	AVAWS	(b0)	–0.026	0.017	–1.529	0.126	–0.059	0.007	–0.026	–0.027

INFLUENCE OF AGE AND OCCUPATION

Next, we added age group and occupation (trade/labour or not working, with professional/service as the reference category[1]) as controls to the SEM. The AVAWS scores slightly decrease as respondents get older. Compared to professional/service workers, trade/labour workers and especially those not working have lower AVAWS scores. This model (AGIS and all demographic variables) explains 49.0% of the variance in AVAWS.

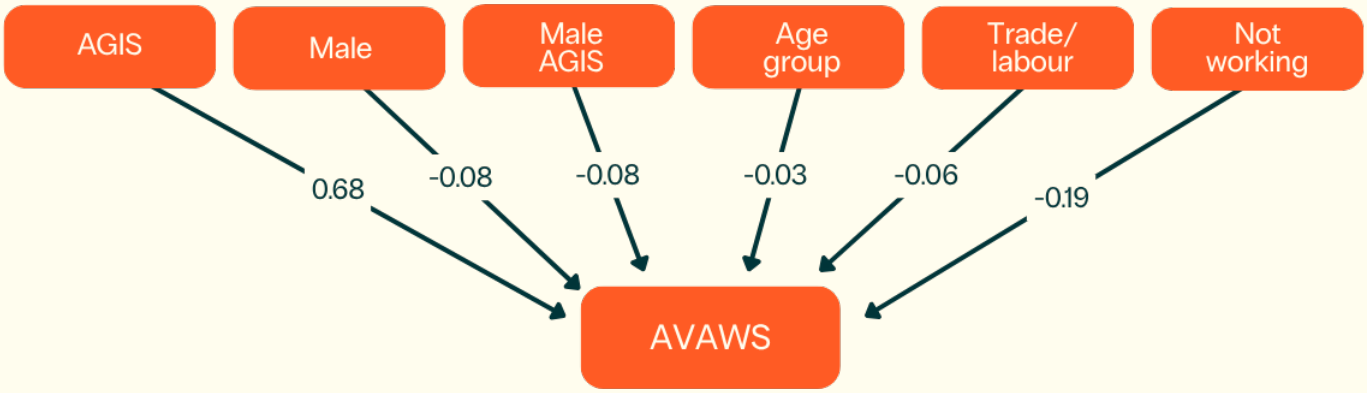
Table 9 depicts the SEM with regression coefficients at each stage, and Figure 6 depicts the path coefficients for this stage of the conceptual model, including AGIS and all demographic variables predicting AVAWS. AGIS has the largest coefficient among the variables included in this model. Of the demographic variables, the 'not working' category has the largest coefficient. The gender interaction is also statistically significant in this model, though weaker than expected, and the AGIS–AVAWS relationship is slightly stronger for women and non-binary people than for men.

Table 9. SEM results including demographic variables, including AGIS–AVAWS gender moderation effect

Type	Outcome	Predictor	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(>|z|)	ci.lower	ci.upper	Std.lv	Std.all
Regression	AVAWS	AGIS	0.680	0.019	36.711	0.000	0.643	0.716	0.680	0.694
Regression	AVAWS	Male	–0.080	0.026	–3.046	0.002	–0.132	–0.029	–0.080	–0.042
Regression	AVAWS	Male AGIS	–0.076	0.032	–2.393	0.017	–0.137	–0.014	–0.076	–0.052
Regression	AVAWS	Age group	–0.025	0.007	–3.739	0.000	–0.038	–0.012	–0.025	–0.048
Regression	AVAWS	Trade/labour	–0.058	0.038	–1.520	0.129	–0.132	0.017	–0.058	–0.021
Regression	AVAWS	Not working	–0.189	0.027	–7.120	0.000	–0.241	–0.137	–0.189	–0.097
Intercept	AVAWS	constant	0.165	0.032	5.110	0.000	0.102	0.228	0.165	0.171

[1] Data collected on occupation was coded to Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZCO) major, minor, sub-major and unit groups, then collapsed into categories of Trade/labour (ANZSCO 3, 7, 8) and Professional/service (ANZSCO 1, 2, 4, 5, 6).

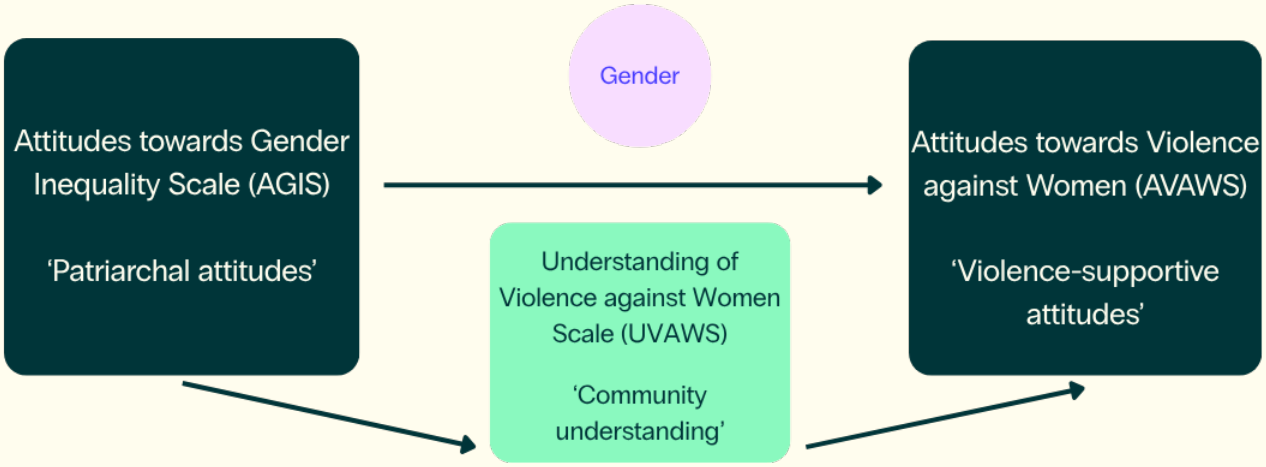
Figure 6. Path coefficients for demographic variables to AVAWS



RQ2: DOES UNDERSTANDING OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND ITS GENDERED NATURE (UVAWS) MEDIATE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGIS AND AVAWS?

We predict that greater understanding of the gendered nature of violence will weaken the relationship between patriarchal attitudes and violence-supportive attitudes, acting as a mediator.

Figure 7. Conceptual model depicting relationship between AGIS and AVAWS, mediated by UVAWS



Hypothesis 2: UVAWS will mediate the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS, with high UVAWS eliminating the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS. That is, the association between AGIS and AVAWS is dependent on a person's understanding of violence against women.

Results: The hypothesis is partially confirmed – UVAWS explains some of the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS, but the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS does not fully depend on a person's understanding of violence against women.

To test a mediated relationship, we first checked that the three variables are directly associated with each other. In this case, this means that AGIS should be associated with UVAWS, and UVAWS should be associated with AVAWS in turn. Table 10 and Table 11 present the SEM results from this analysis.

Table 10 presents the SEM results predicting UVAWS from AGIS. The expected relationship between AGIS and UVAWS is confirmed, with a coefficient of 0.472 (a one-unit increase in AGIS is associated with a 0.472-unit increase in UVAWS). AGIS accounts for 21.5% of the variance in UVAWS.

Table 10. SEM results predicting UVAWS from AGIS

Type	Outcome	Predictor	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(>|z|)	ci.lower	ci.upper	Std.lv	Std.all
Regression	UVAWS	AGIS (b1)	0.472	0.016	29.789	0.000	0.441	0.503	0.472	0.464
Intercept	UVAWS	(b0)	–0.037	0.015	–2.397	0.017	–0.067	–0.007	–0.037	–0.037

Table 11 presents the SEM results predicting AVAWS from UVAWS. The expected relationship between UVAWS and AVAWS is confirmed, with a coefficient of 0.471 (a one-unit increase in UVAWS is associated with a 0.471-unit increase in AVAWS). UVAWS accounts for 24% of the variance in AVAWS.

Table 11. SEM results predicting AVAWS from UVAWS

Type	Outcome	Predictor	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(>|z|)	ci.lower	ci.upper	Std.lv	Std.all
Regression	AVAWS	UVAWS (b1)	0.471	0.015	32.136	0.000	0.443	0.500	0.471	0.490
Intercept	AVAWS	(b0)	–0.085	0.015	–5.849	0.000	–0.114	–0.057	–0.085	–0.088

Table 12 presents the results of the SEM testing for mediation, with UVAWS as a mediator between AGIS and AVAWS, and AGIS also acting directly on AVAWS, including demographic variables as controls. This model accounts for 52.6% of the variance in AVAWS.

Including UVAWS in the model reduces the strength of the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS (from 0.68 to 0.58) but does not remove the association. This pattern is described as partial mediation: in these cross-sectional data, UVAWS accounts statistically for part of the AGIS–AVAWS association, but the analysis does not establish that increasing understanding will cause a change in either AGIS or AVAWS.

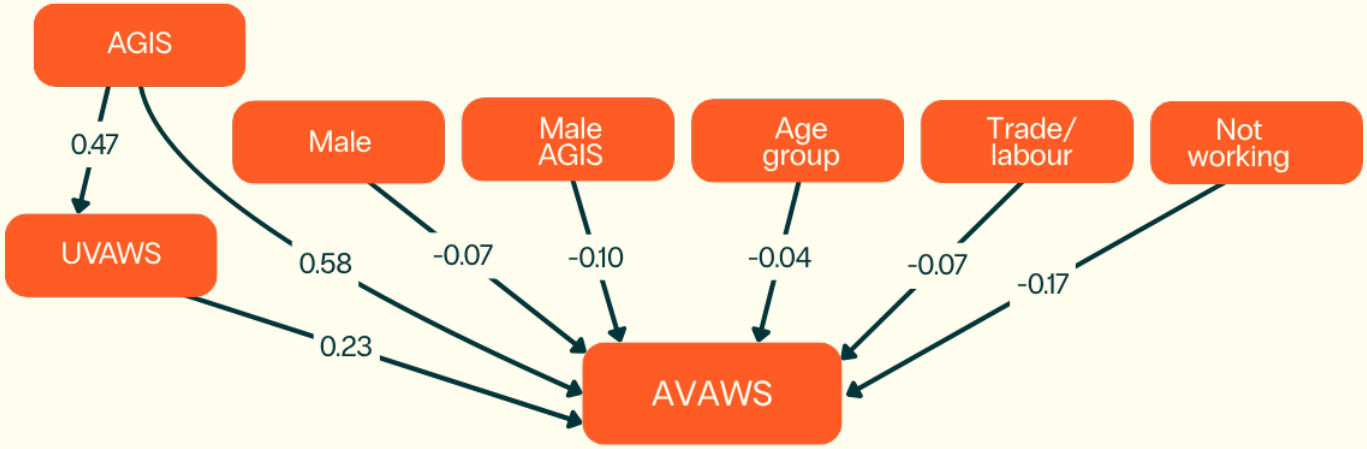
Table 12. SEM testing for mediation

Type	Outcome	Predictor	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(>|z|)	ci.lower	ci.upper	Std.lv	Std.all
Regression	AVAWS	UVAWS (b)	0.227	0.014	16.594	0.000	0.200	0.254	0.227	0.235
Regression	AVAWS	AGIS (c)	0.581	0.019	30.455	0.000	0.544	0.618	0.581	0.591
Regression	AVAWS	Male (d1)	–0.071	0.025	–2.828	0.005	–0.121	–0.022	–0.071	–0.037
Regression	AVAWS	Male AGIS (d2)	–0.102	0.030	–3.376	0.001	–0.160	–0.043	–0.102	–0.069

Type	Outcome	Predictor	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(>|z|)	ci.lower	ci.upper	Std.lv	Std.all
Regression	AVAWS	Age group (e1)	–0.044	0.006	–6.840	0.000	–0.057	–0.032	–0.044	–0.084
Regression	AVAWS	Trade/labour (e2)	–0.068	0.037	–1.831	0.067	–0.141	0.005	–0.068	–0.024
Regression	AVAWS	Not working (e3)	–0.174	0.025	–6.848	0.000	–0.224	–0.124	–0.174	–0.089
Regression	UVAWS	AGIS (a)	0.472	0.016	29.789	0.000	0.441	0.503	0.472	0.464

This pattern is consistent with the possibility that knowledge and understanding of violence against women may buffer the association between AGIS and AVAWS, while the relationship also persists independently of understanding. However, because the data are cross-sectional, the model does not demonstrate an intervention effect. The direct association between UVAWS and AVAWS supports further testing of violence-literacy approaches alongside work to address attitudes supporting gender inequality. Figure 8 depicts the SEM path coefficients of this explanatory model.

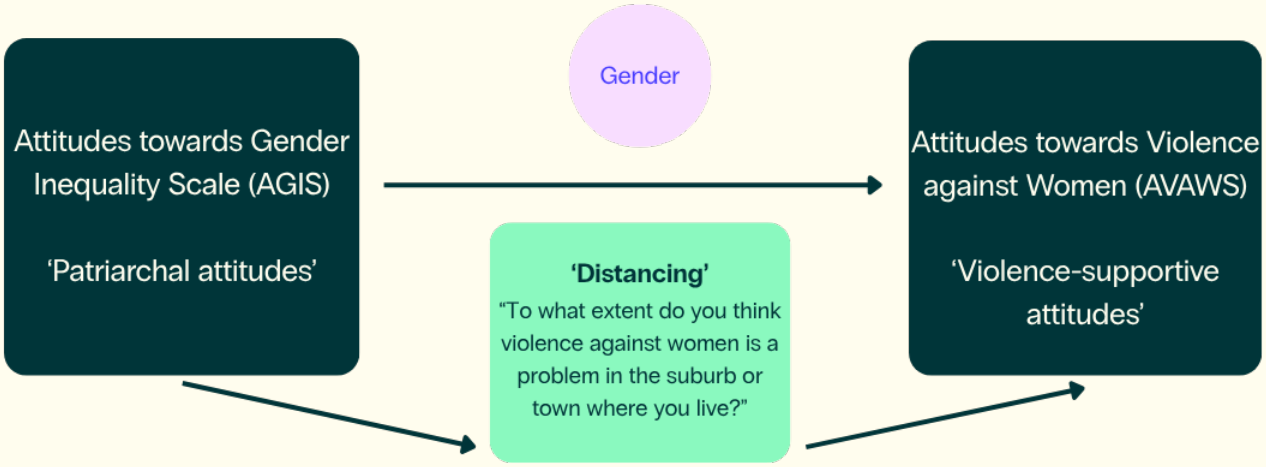
Figure 8. SEM path coefficients including AGIS–AVAWS mediated by UVAWS



RQ3: DOES BELIEVING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IS NOT A PROBLEM WHERE YOU LIVE (DISTANCING) MEDIATE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGIS AND AVAWS?

We predict that local acknowledgement of violence as a problem (lower psychological distance) will partially mediate the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS.

Figure 9. Conceptual model depicting relationship between AGIS and AVAWS, mediated by Distancing



Hypothesis 3: Distancing will mediate the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS, with greater degrees of Distancing reducing the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS. That is, the association between AGIS and AVAWS is dependent on a person believing violence is a problem where they live.

Results: The hypothesis is partially confirmed. Distancing accounts statistically for part of the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS, but it does not fully account for the association. Greater local acknowledgement of violence as a problem (lower psychological distance) is associated with a weaker relationship between endorsement of gender inequality and violence-supportive attitudes. This does not establish that changing perceptions of local relevance will cause changes in violence-supportive attitudes.

As above, to test for a mediated relationship, we first checked that the three variables are directly associated with each other. In this case, this means that AGIS should be associated with Distancing, and in turn, Distancing should be associated with AVAWS. Table 13 and Table 14 present the SEM results from this analysis. Distancing is a reverse-coded numeric variable comprising a single item ('Violence against women is a problem in the suburb/town where I live'), with higher scores indicating greater local acknowledgement and lower psychological distance.

Table 13 presents the SEM results predicting Distancing from AGIS. The expected relationship between AGIS and Distancing is confirmed, with a coefficient of 0.3 (a one-unit increase in AGIS is associated with a 0.3-unit increase in the Distancing score, indicating greater local acknowledgement). AGIS accounts for 5.3% of the variance in Distancing.

Table 13. SEM results predicting Distancing from AGIS

Type	Outcome	Predictor	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(>|z|)	ci.lower	ci.upper	Std.lv	Std.all
Regression	Distancing suburb	AGIS (b1)	0.300	0.046	6.521	0.000	0.210	0.391	0.300	0.230
Intercept	Distancing suburb	(b0)	3.387	0.050	67.855	0.000	3.289	3.485	3.387	2.532

Table 14 presents the SEM results predicting AVAWS from Distancing. The expected relationship between Distancing and AVAWS is confirmed, with a coefficient of 0.199 (a one-unit increase in Distancing is associated with a 0.199-unit increase in AVAWS). Distancing accounts for 8% of the variance in AVAWS.

Table 14. SEM results predicting AVAWS from Distancing

Type	Outcome	Predictor	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(>|z|)	ci.lower	ci.upper	Std.lv	Std.all
Regression	AVAWS	Distancing suburb (b1)	0.199	0.024	8.386	0.000	0.153	0.246	0.199	0.282
Intercept	AVAWS	(b0)	–0.825	0.076	–10.854	0.000	–0.974	–0.676	–0.825	–0.874

Table 15 presents the results of the SEM testing for mediation, with Distancing as a mediator between AGIS and AVAWS, and AGIS also acting directly on AVAWS, including demographic variables as controls. This model accounts for 54.7% of the variance in AVAWS.

Including Distancing in the model reduces the strength of the relationship between AGIS and AVAWS (from 0.68 to 0.63) but does not remove the association. This pattern is described as partial mediation: greater local acknowledgement of violence as a problem (lower psychological distance) accounts statistically for part of the relationship between gender-inequality attitudes and violence-supportive attitudes. It is consistent with local acknowledgement acting as a possible buffer, but does not establish an intervention effect.

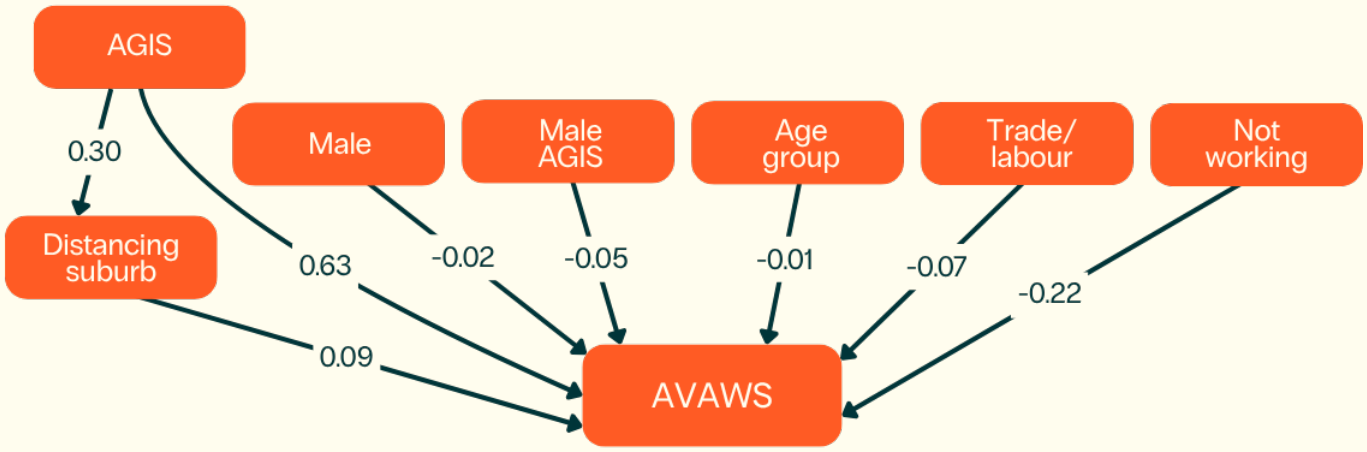
Table 15. SEM results including Distancing mediator

Type	Outcome	Predictor	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(>|z|)	ci.lower	ci.upper	Std.lv	Std.all
Regression	AVAWS	Distancing suburb (b)	0.093	0.018	5.244	0.000	0.058	0.128	0.093	0.132
Regression	AVAWS	AGIS (c)	0.632	0.035	18.002	0.000	0.563	0.701	0.632	0.585
Regression	AVAWS	Male (d1)	–0.021	0.052	–0.399	0.691	–0.122	0.081	–0.021	–0.011

Type	Outcome	Predictor	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(>|z|)	ci.lower	ci.upper	Std.lv	Std.all
Regression	AVAWS	Male AGIS (d2)	–0.050	0.058	–0.870	0.384	–0.164	0.063	–0.050	–0.033
Regression	AVAWS	Age group (e1)	–0.012	0.004	–3.101	0.002	–0.021	–0.004	–0.012	–0.041
Regression	AVAWS	Trade/labour (e2)	–0.070	0.037	–1.883	0.060	–0.214	0.074	–0.070	–0.027
Regression	AVAWS	Not working (e3)	–0.218	0.055	–3.995	0.000	–0.325	–0.111	–0.218	–0.115
Regression	Distancing suburb	AGIS (a)	0.300	0.046	6.521	0.000	0.210	0.391	0.300	0.230
Intercept	AVAWS	(b0)	–0.245	0.078	–3.165	0.002	–0.397	–0.093	–0.245	–0.260
Intercept	Distancing suburb	(b0)	3.387	0.050	67.855	0.000	3.289	3.485	3.387	2.532

The path coefficients for the Distancing mediation model are smaller than those for the UVAWS mediation model, suggesting UVAWS may be a stronger explanatory variable (Figure 10). However, Distancing is measured using a single item on a 5-point scale and was administered to only a subset of the sample. Measuring Distancing-related attitudes using a multi-item scale and administering it to the entire sample may have produced different estimates. The focal path coefficients depicted in Figure 10 are statistically significant, indicating that lower local acknowledgement is associated with more violence-supportive attitudes in this sample.

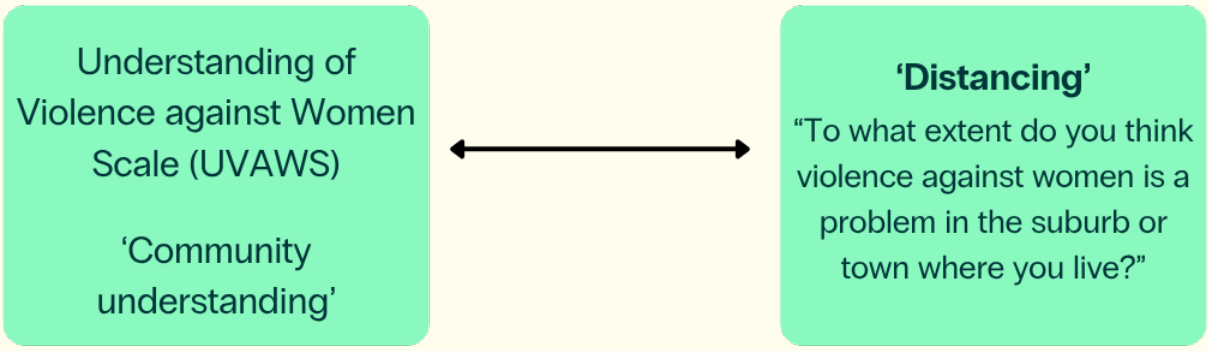
Figure 10. Path coefficients including Distancing



RQ4: ARE UVAWS AND DISTANCING ASSOCIATED WITH EACH OTHER?

We predict that individuals with stronger understanding of the gendered nature of violence will be more likely to acknowledge the problem locally, indicating a positive association between UVAWS and the reverse-coded Distancing score.

Figure 11. Conceptual model depicting association between UVAWS and Distancing



Hypothesis 4: UVAWS and Distancing will be associated with each other, with lower acknowledgment that violence against women is a problem where people live being associated with lower understanding and knowledge of violence against women and its gendered nature.

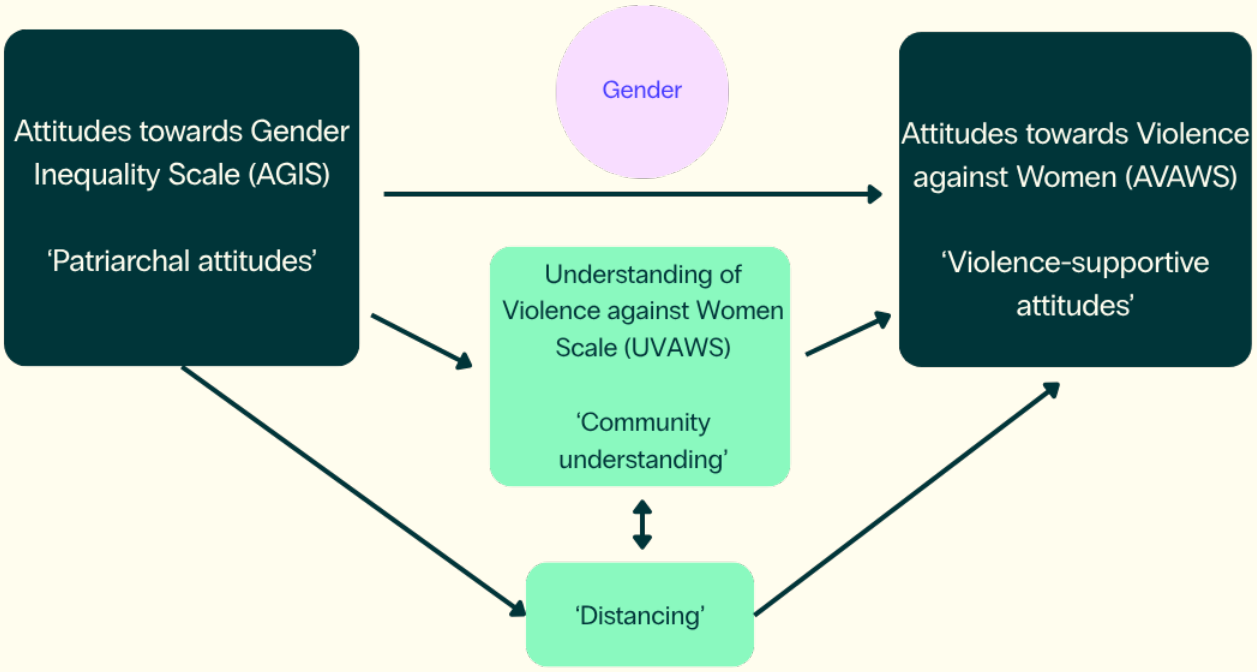
Results: The hypothesis is confirmed. Distancing and UVAWS are associated with each other.

In the full SEM, UVAWS and Distancing are permitted to covary. Their coefficient of 0.17 indicates that higher understanding of violence against women is associated with greater acknowledgement that violence is a problem in a person's suburb or town.

RQ5: HOW MUCH VARIATION IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IS ACCOUNTED FOR BY THE FULL STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODEL?

We predict that the full SEM will account for a high proportion of the variation in AVAWS scores while integrating the proposed predictors, mediators, moderator and demographic controls.

Figure 12. Depiction of full conceptual model with all variables included



Hypothesis 5: With all variables entered into the structural equation model, the individual relationships identified above will largely persist, and the full conceptual model will account for a high proportion of variance in attitudes towards violence against women in Victoria.

Results: The hypothesis is confirmed, with some caveats.

Table 16 presents the full SEM coefficients, including the AGIS–AVAWS relationship, UVAWS and Distancing as proposed mediators, the association between UVAWS and Distancing, gender as a proposed moderator, and demographic controls. The full model accounts for 57.5% of the variation in AVAWS scores. This indicates substantial shared variation among the included constructs, while 42.5% of the variation is associated with factors not measured in the model or otherwise unexplained. It does not establish causal explanation or model completeness.

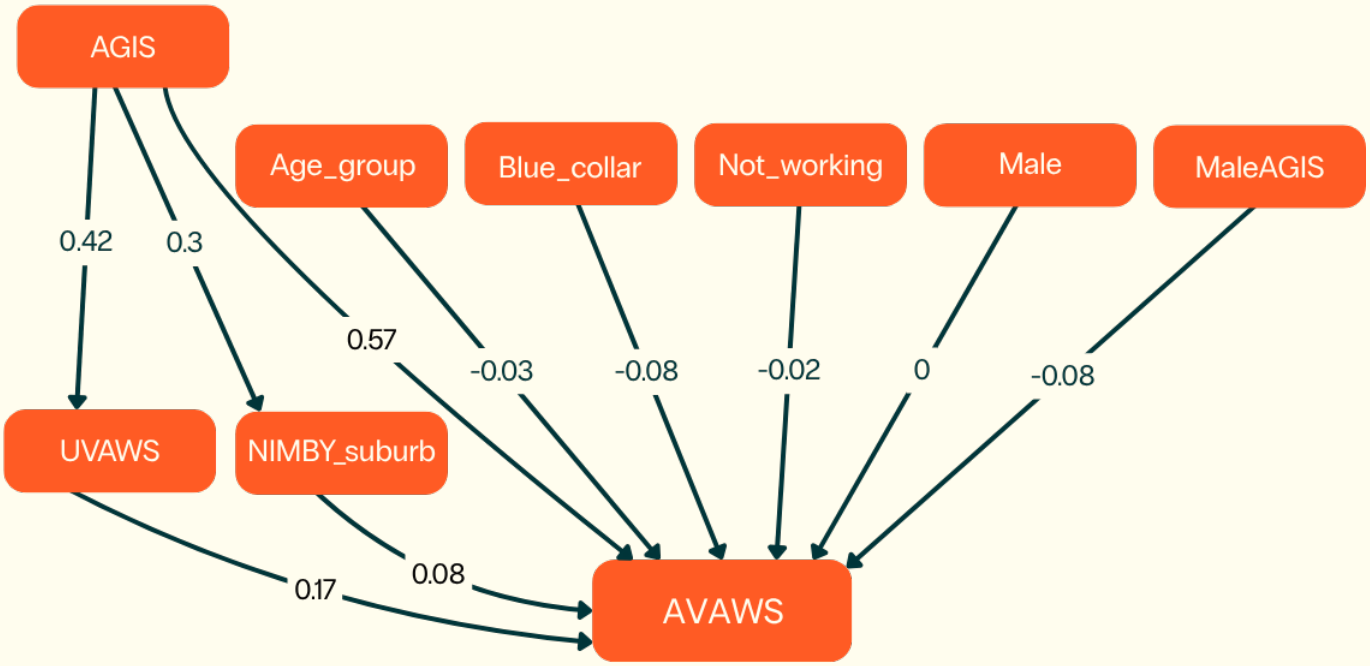
Among the variables included in the full model, AGIS has the largest standardised coefficient with AVAWS. UVAWS and Distancing also have statistically significant coefficients. Age group and the 'not working' category are statistically significant demographic controls, while trade/labour occupation, the gender main effect and the gender-by-AGIS interaction are not statistically significant in the full model. In the separate AGIS subscale model, Deny Inequality has the strongest association with AVAWS, followed by Reinforce Gender Roles.

Table 16. Regression coefficients of all variables entered into the SEM

Type	Outcome	Predictor	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(>|z|)	ci.lower	ci.upper	Std.lv	Std.all
Regression	AVAWS	AGIS (b1)	0.573	0.037	15.674	0.000	0.502	0.645	0.573	0.620
Regression	AVAWS	UVAWS (m1)	0.169	0.028	5.960	0.000	0.113	0.224	0.169	0.172
Regression	AVAWS	Distancing suburb (m2)	0.079	0.017	4.655	0.000	0.046	0.113	0.079	0.112
Regression	AVAWS	Age group (c1)	–0.029	0.013	–2.332	0.020	–0.054	–0.005	–0.029	–0.057
Regression	AVAWS	Trade/labour (c2)	–0.084	0.073	–1.146	0.252	–0.226	0.059	–0.084	–0.032
Regression	AVAWS	Not working (c3)	–0.203	0.063	–3.246	0.001	–0.326	–0.080	–0.203	–0.106
Regression	AVAWS	Male (d1)	–0.003	0.052	–0.057	0.954	–0.104	0.098	–0.003	–0.002
Regression	AVAWS	Male AGIS (d2)	–0.076	0.058	–1.314	0.189	–0.189	0.037	–0.076	–0.050
Regression	UVAWS	AGIS (c)	0.421	0.031	13.502	0.000	0.360	0.482	0.421	0.446
Regression	Distancing suburb	AGIS (d)	0.300	0.046	6.521	0.000	0.210	0.391	0.300	0.230
Covariance	UVAWS	Distancing suburb	0.166	0.045	3.659	0.000	0.077	0.255	0.166	0.148
Intercept	AVAWS	(b0)	–0.155	0.076	–2.042	0.041	–0.303	–0.006	–0.155	–0.163
Intercept	UVAWS	(b0)	–0.005	0.033	–0.140	0.888	–0.070	0.060	–0.005	–0.005
Intercept	Distancing suburb	(b0)	3.387	0.050	67.855	0.000	3.289	3.485	3.387	2.532

Figure 13 illustrates the full SEM. The patterns involving UVAWS and Distancing remain consistent with partial mediation, and AGIS is associated with both proposed mediators as well as AVAWS. Among the variables included, AGIS has the largest direct association with AVAWS. These coefficients do not establish causal influence or the unique proportion of variance attributable to any one scale.

Figure 13. Path coefficients of full SEM



DISCUSSION

This paper asks a practical primary prevention question: how are attitudes in different domains associated with attitudes that normalise, minimise or excuse violence against women? Using the weighted Victorian NCAS 2021 sample, the analysis tests a theoretically specified, cross-sectional model linking attitudes towards gender inequality (AGIS), understanding of violence against women (UVAWS), psychological distancing, and violence-supportive attitudes (AVAWS). SEM allows these relationships, including proposed indirect pathways, to be examined simultaneously. It does not establish the temporal or causal sequence through which attitudes form or change.

Among the variables included in the model, AGIS has the strongest association with AVAWS after accounting for demographics and the proposed mediators. This is consistent with the centrality of gender inequality in primary prevention frameworks (1, 2, 7, 10). Practically, the result supports addressing beliefs about gender inequality alongside education or messaging about violence. It does not show that changing gender-inequality attitudes alone will shift violence-supportive attitudes at scale or reduce violence.

Within AGIS, Deny Inequality has the strongest association with AVAWS, followed by Reinforce Gender Roles. One plausible interpretation is that denial of inequality can function as a justificatory frame: if gender inequality is assumed not to exist, claims about gendered violence may be more readily dismissed as exaggerated, unfair or ideologically motivated. Combined with endorsement of rigid gender roles, this worldview may weaken the perceived legitimacy of women's experiences and collective responsibility for prevention. This interpretation is consistent with, but not directly tested by, the model.

The gender pattern is more nuanced than a simple 'men hold more harmful attitudes' account. Men have lower AVAWS scores on average. In reduced models, the AGIS–AVAWS association is slightly stronger

for the combined women and non-binary group than for men, contrary to the hypothesised direction; however, the interaction is not statistically significant in the full model. The result should therefore be treated as tentative. Measurement explanations, including ceiling effects or differences in how the scales operate across groups, remain plausible. Testing measurement invariance would strengthen future comparisons, and the combined category does not support separate conclusions about non-binary respondents.

UVAWS partially mediates the AGIS–AVAWS relationship in the statistical model: stronger recognition of violence and its gendered nature accounts for part, but not all, of the association between attitudes supporting gender inequality and violence-supportive attitudes. Because the data are cross-sectional, this pattern is consistent with a possible indirect pathway but does not establish causal mediation. It nevertheless aligns with prevention frameworks in which community knowledge is important but insufficient in isolation. For Victorian practice, the finding supports testing violence-literacy initiatives alongside explicit work to address denial of inequality and rigid gender-role endorsement, rather than assuming knowledge change will automatically translate into broader attitude change.

The model also identifies a distinct psychological distancing pattern. People with more gender-unequal attitudes are less likely to acknowledge violence as a problem in their own suburb or town, and local acknowledgement accounts statistically for part of the AGIS–AVAWS association. This is consistent with research describing how violence against women can be framed as something that happens ‘elsewhere’ or among ‘other’ groups through cultural othering, stereotyping and moral boundary drawing (14–16), as well as social identity processes that protect a positive image of one’s own community (11). The association is smaller than that involving UVAWS, and Distancing is measured by a single reverse-coded item administered to a subset of respondents. Its persistence identifies local relevance as a promising area for further measurement and intervention testing, rather than demonstrating that place-based messaging is effective.

The association between UVAWS and Distancing suggests that narrower recognition of violence can co-occur with a tendency to see violence as ‘not here’; it does not establish that one causes the other. Both are also associated with attitudes supporting gender inequality. Taken together, the model suggests that responses to violence may involve both definitional questions – what people recognise as violence – and psychological distance from the issue. This provides a rationale for testing whether efforts to broaden recognition of coercive control and other non-physical forms of violence are strengthened when prevention is also made locally relevant and socially shared.

LIMITATIONS

This analysis uses secondary, cross-sectional self-report data from the 2021 NCAS. It provides a point-in-time account of associations and cannot establish temporal order, causal mediation, intervention effects or behaviour change. The data were collected during the COVID-19 period and should not be treated as current estimates of Victorian attitudes. Participation, survey coverage, item non-response, social-desirability bias and topic sensitivity may also have influenced responses. The use of validated observed composite scale scores is appropriate to the analysis but does not remove potential conceptual overlap or shared-method effects between measures.

The Distancing construct is represented by one reverse-coded item administered to a subset of the sample and may capture local awareness or perceived prevalence as well as psychological distance. Gender comparisons are constrained by the available categories and sample sizes, including the combination of women and non-binary respondents; separate conclusions about gender-diverse

respondents cannot be drawn. Although the models incorporated survey weights, they include only selected NCAS attitudes and demographics and do not comprehensively account for other individual, relational, community and structural factors relevant to violence and its prevention, including alcohol and other drug use, economic stress, employment conditions, housing insecurity and other social determinants. The findings should therefore be used to generate and refine prevention hypotheses, not as evidence that changing any single attitude will reduce violence.

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