COMPANION BRIEF

HIGH-IMPACT ATTITUDES

PURPOSE AND AUDIENCE

This brief explains what Respect Victoria's High-Impact Attitudes research found and what the findings may mean for prevention, policy, communications, research and evaluation. It provides a high-level summary of the 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 examined individual questions from the 2021 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey.

The analysis looked at which beliefs were:

- relatively common or contested in Victoria
- different between men and women and respondents of other genders
- closely linked with broader attitudes towards violence against women, gender inequality and understanding of violence.

Most Victorians rejected overtly harmful beliefs. However, some false-accusation and minimisation narratives remained relatively common. Beliefs about male authority were closely linked with broader gender-inequitable attitudes, while recognition of some forms of non-physical abuse was less consistent.

The findings highlight beliefs that may warrant closer attention in prevention, communications and monitoring. They do not show that changing any one belief will change behaviour or 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.

This brief provides an accessible summary and should be read alongside Respect Victoria's full technical paper, High-Impact Attitudes, for detailed methods, results and limitations.

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NOTE ON LIMITATIONS

The findings are a point-in-time analysis of data collected in 2021 during the COVID-19 period. They do not establish causal mechanisms, intervention effects, or current Victorian attitudes. Survey participation, non-response, and social desirability effects may also affect interpretation.

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 Violence against Women Scale,** 43 items;
- **Attitudes towards Gender Inequality Scale,** 17 items;
- **Understanding of Violence against Women Scale,** 19 items

ANALYSIS

- Strong marker attitudes clearly distinguish respondents with higher or lower overall scores on the relevant NCAS scale
- High-reach contested attitudes are more commonly endorsed, show greater disagreement or have larger gender differences.

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KEY FINDINGS

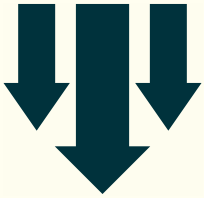


UNDERMINING CREDIBILITY

35%
agreed women in custody disputes often exaggerate domestic violence claims.

30%
agreed sexual assault accusations are commonly used to 'get back at men'.

21%
agreed women reporting rape had often 'led the man on' and regretted it.



MINIMISING INEQUALITY

38%
agreed women mistake innocent behaviour for sexism.

33%
agreed women exaggerate how unequally they are treated.

30%
agreed women do not appreciate all that men do for them.



RECOGNISING VIOLENCE

81%
recognised denying access to shared money as violence.

83%
recognised tracking a partner through devices without consent.

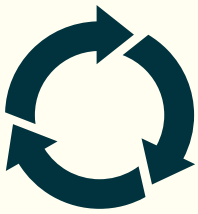
87%
recognised preventing contact with family or friends.

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LINKS TO OVERALL ATTITUDES

Some individual questions were especially useful for distinguishing people with more or less harmful overall attitudes. These were not always the most commonly held beliefs. Instead, they were the beliefs most closely connected with a person's broader pattern of responses.



VIOLENCE-SUPPORTIVE ATTITUDES

The strongest markers centred on:

- sexual violence myths
- blaming women for violence
- doubting or dismissing women's accounts of violence.

People who endorsed these beliefs were also more likely to hold a broader pattern of violence-supportive attitudes.



GENDER INEQUALITY

The strongest markers centred on beliefs that men are better suited to:

- lead workplaces, communities and politics
- hold positions of authority
- control decisions in households and relationships.

Most Victorians rejected these beliefs, but where they were endorsed, they were closely linked with broader gender-inequitable attitudes.



UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE

The strongest markers involved recognising non-physical forms of control, including:

- economic abuse
- religious and social control
- technology-facilitated monitoring
- identity-based coercion.

Recognition was high overall, but these questions helped distinguish people with stronger or weaker understanding of violence against women.

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WHAT WE FOUND

1. Most overtly harmful attitudes were uncommon
Most Victorians rejected overtly violence-supportive and gender-inequitable statements. Some specific beliefs were nevertheless comparatively common or showed meaningful differences between respondents.

2. Credibility and false-accusation narratives stood out
Sexual violence myths and scepticism about the credibility of people who have experienced violence were among the strongest markers of broader violence-supportive attitudes. Some false-accusation narratives were also endorsed by around one-third of Victorians.

3. Minimisation of inequality was relatively common
Around one-third of Victorians agreed that women exaggerate inequality, misinterpret innocent behaviour as sexist, or do not appreciate what men do for them. Men were consistently more likely to agree.

4. Beliefs about male authority were strong markers
Beliefs that men make better bosses, community leaders or political leaders, or should control households, were among the strongest markers of broader gender-inequality attitudes, although most Victorians rejected them.

5. Recognition of non-physical abuse was high but uneven
Most Victorians recognised economic abuse, technology-facilitated monitoring, social isolation and identity-based control as violence. Recognition was less consistent for some specific behaviours and was lower among men on several items.

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WHAT THIS MEANS

1. Common attitudes and strong markers need different responses
Relatively common narratives may be suitable for broad communication and community norm-setting. Less common but strongly aligned marker beliefs may require more intensive, settings-based work and further testing.

2. Counter specific credibility narratives
Address disbelief, false-accusation and victim-blaming narratives directly. Use clear counter-framing that does not inadvertently repeat or legitimise the myth.

3. Challenge minimisation of inequality
Address claims that inequality is exaggerated or sexism is being misinterpreted. Their comparatively broad reach makes these narratives relevant to public communication and community norm-setting.

4. Address beliefs about men's leadership and control
Use focused work in workplaces, leadership settings, community organisations, households and relationships to examine entitlement, decision-making and expectations of male authority.

5. Reinforce recognition of coercive control
Clarify how economic abuse, technological monitoring, religious control, social isolation and identity-based coercion operate in practice.

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ABOUT THIS PAGE

This page considers how the findings from **'High-impact 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 SUPPORTING LONG-TERM PRIMARY PREVENTION

Reinforce existing commitments to prevention infrastructure, including gender equality policy, campaigns, and education initiatives. Maintain focus on reducing violence-supportive attitudes across multiple domains.

CONTINUE BUILDING COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING AND AWARENESS

Bolster efforts to address victim-blaming attitudes and the minimisation of sexual violence, particularly among men, through policies and campaigns that build recognition and understanding of underacknowledged forms of violence against women.

CONTINUE STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT OF MEN AND BOYS

Gender differences in attitudes, with men more likely to hold violence-supportive views, highlight the value of strategies that directly engage men and boys. These findings validate current approaches aimed at men and boys and can inform further targeted efforts to challenge harmful beliefs within this cohort.

CONSIDER REFINING HOW PROGRESS IS MEASURED

Explore more tailored ways to assess community attitudes to inform and evaluate policy responses. Studies that are designed to measure drivers of gendered violence at state and sub-state levels could look beyond state-level averages of community attitudes to violence against women to better capture both progressive shifts and entrenched resistance within specific segments of the population.

CONSIDER A TAILORED, MULTI-LAYERED APPROACH

Develop policy responses that anticipate polarisation. Support consistent, layered gender-sensitive policy approaches that work to mitigate resistance and backlash to violence prevention efforts among some groups, whilst fortifying support. Protecting progress in attitudes, norms and behaviours requires targeted approaches at the individual, community, and systems level to disrupt polarisation.

CONSIDER CENTERING THE EXPERIENCES OF MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES

Homophobia and transphobia, along with the minimisation of violence against LGBTIQA+ people, are inextricably linked to cis men's violence against cis women. Policy responses that seek to address these prejudices and that recognise the unique ways violence is experienced by marginalised groups — who are at higher risk of being blamed or disbelieved — offer an opportunity to deliver more inclusive, equitable prevention responses that also challenge deeply rooted beliefs that underpin gendered violence more broadly.

Citation: Respect Victoria. High-impact attitudes (Companion brief 01/2026). Melbourne: Respect Victoria; 2026.

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ABOUT THIS PAGE

This page identifies ways that the findings from **'High-impact attitudes'** could 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 BUILDING UNDERSTANDING OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Raising awareness of violence against women remains essential — especially underrecognised non-physical forms of violence such as coercive control and digital harassment. This includes increasing awareness of the unique ways violence is experienced by marginalised groups.

CONTINUE CHALLENGING RIGID GENDER STEREOTYPES

Challenging rigid gender stereotypes remains an important focus, particularly those that reinforce traditional beliefs that emphasise male authority. These deeply rooted gender norms underpin attitudes that minimise or condone violence against women, making them a critical area for ongoing attention in prevention efforts.

CONTINUE WORKING WITH MEN AND BOYS

Gender differences in attitudes validate current efforts to engage men and boys in order to challenge harmful beliefs that inform violence-supportive attitudes. Reinforcing progressive messaging across different spheres could help to address polarisation in attitudes, particularly among those more likely to hold violence-supportive views.

CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON THE 'MOVEABLE MIDDLE'

The 'moveable middle' holds nuanced and sometimes conflicting views, yet many are open to progressive ideas. This group is critical to long-term change, and significant primary prevention opportunities lie in continuing to build issue salience and a sense of personal relevance among this cohort to support attitudinal shifts.

CONTINUE APPLYING A MULTI-LEVEL APPROACH

Navigating the many layers of influence that shape social norms and individual attitudes remains a major challenge. The socioecological framework continues to provide a valuable guide for designing interventions that respond to interconnected influences that create, shape, and maintain attitudes to violence.

CONSIDER A SEGMENTED APPROACH

In a polarised attitudinal landscape, tailoring strategies to different population segments may improve the effectiveness of primary prevention. A targeted approach creates opportunities to address resistance to change, build issue salience among the less engaged, and sustain momentum among those who already hold progressive views.

CONSIDER INTENSIVE EFFORTS TO SHIFT HIGH-IMPACT ATTITUDES

Shifting deeply held attitudes such as victim-blaming and the minimisation of sexual violence is both an opportunity and a challenge. These attitudes remain prevalent in some parts of the community and may require more intensive or consistent efforts to shift. A focus on these high-impact attitudes could strengthen, not replace, ongoing efforts to target all drivers of violence against women.

CONSIDER THE NON-LINEAR NATURE OF ATTITUDINAL CHANGE

Attitudes shift at different paces and in different directions, which is a challenge for those developing primary prevention strategies. Primary prevention efforts may benefit from flexible strategies that reflect this complexity, adapting approaches to meet people where they're at, be it open to change or resistant.

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This page outlines how findings from **'High-impact attitudes'** can help to strengthen measurement, evaluation and future research. The research 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 TO COLLECT ONCE, USE OFTEN

This paper demonstrates the value of using secondary data to look beneath the surface of averages and scales and identify barriers and pathways to attitude change.

It established a strong foundation and replicable methodology for leveraging secondary analysis to hypothesise and test mechanisms of attitude change.

CONTINUE REFINING AND VALIDATING PREVENTION EFFORTS

Research that develops, tests, and refines pathways to change plays a critical role in strengthening primary prevention. Ongoing research delivers the evidence base that informs how primary prevention is understood and implemented.

CONTINUE EXPLORING SOCIOECOLOGICAL INFLUENCES

The relationship between individual attitudes, social norms, and institutional influences is complex. Researchers could examine how feedback from across these levels impacts the formation and evolution of attitudes, and whether interventions targeting multiple levels of influence are more effective in driving long-term change.

CONSIDER DIVING DEEPER INTO THE DYNAMICS OF POLARISING ATTITUDES

The socioecological model of violence against women predicts that attitudes will not change in a linear and homogenous trend towards progress. The growing divide between progressive and resistant attitudes presents rich opportunities for further research. Researchers could further explore the intersecting factors driving this polarisation and identify prevention strategies accordingly shifts and entrenched resistance within specific segments of the population.

CONSIDER THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS

To strengthen prevention efforts, further research could explore how shifts in individual attitudes influence behaviour change and when behaviour change itself drives shifts in attitude. This includes exploring which pathways to change are most effective.

CONSIDER HOW SHIFTING HIGH-IMPACT ATTITUDES SHAPES SOCIAL NORMS

Further research could examine how shifts in high-impact attitudes translate into broader social norm changes. Mapping these attitude-specific pathways could enhance understanding of how and why these attitudes evolve over time.

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