

Response from Our Watch:

Is Bettina Arndt correct in saying “*our official statistics show at least a third of the victims [of domestic violence] are male*”? Does this statistic reflect the reality of the problem of domestic violence in our community?

No, this is not correct. The best official statistics we have – Australian Bureau of Statistics data from the regular Personal Safety Survey – show that women are nearly three times as likely to experience violence from an intimate partner than men.

The claim that a third of victims are male has been repeatedly debunked by experts in this field.

The way we have seen this statistic used is that it is picked from one particular data table among many results in the ABS survey. Therefore, using it on its own to portray a full picture of both physical and non-physical intimate partner violence is not appropriate.

The ABS itself has a warning that this figure has a high relative standard error, and should be used with caution.

It is misleading to use this figure alone, whilst ignoring all the other figures in the survey that draw the fuller picture, and that make it very clear that intimate partner violence is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women.

Of course both men and women can experience violence, but ABS data clearly shows violence against women is different in the form it takes as well as its severity and impact.

Around 95 per cent of all victims of violence in Australia – whether men or women – experience violence from a male perpetrator.

Men are more likely to experience a one-off incident of violence in a public place by a stranger, whereas women are more likely to be subject to years of violence, abuse and coercive control at the hands of their current or former partner, often behind closed doors meaning they are also more likely to be living in ongoing fear.

Why are Bettina Arndt’s views so contentious?

Language that downplays, excuses, trivialises or justifies violence against women, or shifts blame from the perpetrator to the victim, contributes to the condoning of violence against women in our society, which we know from the evidence is in itself a driver of that violence.

When people suggest that men have been 'driven too far' and have no other choice but to use violence or that women are somehow to blame for the violent acts inflicted upon them, it is extremely harmful.

Essentially, they are suggesting that it is acceptable for men to use violence against women and that their actions are somehow justified because of the stress their ex-partners have put them under.

This is completely unacceptable. We must condemn the assumption that men need to 'own' or 'control' their partners and children, and that any challenge to this will drive them to violence. Violence is a choice, and there is never any excuse.

How does the media need to approach Bettina Arndt when it comes to discussing domestic violence?

We know from the research that there is a clear link between media reporting and how the community understands and makes sense of violence against women.

While violence against women and their children attracts daily coverage, what is often missing is an understanding of the broader social context in which these individual acts take place – the sexism, gender inequality and community attitudes that help give rise to this violence.

Some reporting and commentary can unfortunately perpetuate or excuse precisely the kinds of attitudes and myths that give rise to this violence in the first place, such as victim-blaming and offering excuses for the perpetrator.

That is why Our Watch created [Media Making Change](#) – a website for journalists to help them report on violence against women responsibly.

The website includes national guidelines for reporters, key research findings on the gendered drivers of violence against women, useful contacts for domestic violence experts to source for an interview in order to help put the issue into context, and advice on interviewing survivors of violence.

The fact that so much of the problem we face is violence perpetrated by men against women will continue to inform the work of Our Watch, and the many other people and organisations who have for decades been working to prevent violence against women and their children, support and seek justice for victims, and promote gender equality.

National media guidelines are here: <https://media.ourwatch.org.au>