

# ANROWS

## AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY *to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children*

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

**It is not accurate to say “at least a third of victims of domestic violence are male”; it is accurate to say “one in three people who reported experiencing an act of violence by a partner in the 12 months prior to the 2016 PSS were male”. That’s all she can say about the victimisation of men:** it’s a limited statement, and it’s viewed in isolation from all the other evidence we have.

We know from the ABS 2016 Personal Safety Survey that for all the people who reported they had experienced an act of physical or sexual violence by a partner in the previous 12 months, one third was male, and *two thirds* were female. Note, a partner relationships refers to a couple who are or have lived together in a marriage or de factor relationship.

This figure represents a limited picture of the experience of partner violence in Australia. The purpose of collecting data for the previous 12 months is to measure change over time. A more complete picture is available in the PSS from the lifetime experience of violence. Here we see a much greater difference between the experiences of men and women in terms of reported experiences of violence: one in six women, and one in 16 men have experienced partner violence since the age of 15.

The context of the violence, whether experienced by men or women, is not known from the Personal Safety Survey. That is, we don’t know whether an act of physical violence by a partner was self-defence or retaliation, or whether it was used as a tactic of coercive control—a form of domestic violence aimed at dominating and controlling the life of a partner. Coercive control is defined by international expert Evan Stark as “an attack on autonomy, liberty, and equality” and experts on typologies of violence agree that coercive controlling abuse is perpetrated almost exclusively by men against women.

This illustrates the need to consider the PSS result referred to by Ms Arndt in light of all the other national and international evidence that consistently shows that women experience domestic violence at much greater rates than do men.

Further, gender differences are also highlighted in PSS results showing that women who experienced assault by a male were twice as likely as men to have experienced anxiety or fear for their safety; and women were more than three times as likely as men to have experienced violence perpetrated by a previous partner.

### **Why are Bettina Arndt's views so contentious?**

The claims: 1) are inaccurate; and 2) appear to be more focussed on undermining the gains made to address violence against women, than genuine concern for men subjected to violence.

- 1) As discussed above this claim is inaccurate; and
- 2) Genuine concern about violence against men would be expressed by responding to the evidence that 4 in 10 Australian men (41%) have experienced physical violence over their lifetime (since age 15), mostly in or around a place of entertainment, and that men are three times as likely as women to have experienced violence by a stranger.

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

Domestic violence is not simply an act of physical violence in a relevant relationship. Context—motive, impact, and consequences—is important. In addition to the above, the media should challenge Bettina Arndt's claim on the basis of the other evidence available that demonstrates that women experience more harm, intimidation and fear (also in PSS), and more negative consequences of acts of violence. When acts of violence are contextualised, the research shows that men's violence against female partners is more frequently geared towards dominating and controlling the lives of their partners, whereas women's violence towards their partners is typically a response to violence perpetrated against them. This is evident in the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network's Data Report 2018. It shows that the majority of men who killed a female partner in the context of domestic violence had been the primary domestic violence abuser, while the majority of women who killed a male intimate partner were the primary victim of that partner's domestic violence.