Welcome! This edition of *Aware* is a bumper issue. It is also our last. From this point on the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault will be publishing smaller, more frequent stand-alone resources in place of *Aware*. This wasn’t an easy decision—we know how popular *Aware* has been with our stakeholders. At the same time, since ACSSA’s inception in 2003, the sexual assault sector has evolved significantly—it is a highly innovative, sophisticated and well-networked sector.

Preventing and responding to sexual assault in our communities increasingly involves partnerships with new agencies and sectors—mental health, housing, drug and alcohol, therapeutic services for sexual offenders, just to name a few. Interagency service delivery and integrated policy development is also prominent. A public health, primary prevention framework has in many ways shifted the “traditional” sexual assault sector well into the domain of mainstream public policy and service provision. More recently, there is the imperative of evidence-informed policy and service provision. We too are evolving along with the sectors working to prevent sexual assault.

In place of *Aware* we aim to provide stakeholders with regular, accessible, and relevant resources to assist you in your work. We will be publishing online Resource Sheets (short, accessible summaries of key issues about sexual assault) and Research Reviews (an accessible synthesis of the current evidence base including findings, implications, and limitations). We will continue to publish both the ACSSA Issues and ACSSA Wrap series.

This final edition of *Aware* includes a summary of recent policy development in various states and territories by ACSSA Research Officer Mary Stathopoulos. We are also pleased to include an article on current research by Bianca Klettke and Sophie Simonis at Deakin University. Their research looked at attitudes individuals hold about adolescent victims of sexual assault and the extent to which they are regarded as responsible for their abuse. Rachel King (formerly ACSSA Research Officer) interviewed Dr Michael Flood and Associate Professor Mary Heath, who each reflect on the concept of “sexual ethics” and the challenges that remain in preventing sexual assault.

I’d like to welcome new research staff to the clearinghouse—Cindy Tarcon, Nicole Bluett-Boyd and Liz Wall join the Institute as ACSSA Research Officers. They each bring expertise, experience, and energy to the work we do and join Mary Stathopoulos and Bianca Fileborn who continue in their roles.

Sadly, we also farewell ACSSA’s Senior Research Officers Haley Clark and Deb Parkinson. Both Haley and Deb brought great passion and commitment to their roles and will be sorely missed by the team and the Institute. After 5 years, Haley goes on to complete her PhD, while Deb takes up the role of Director of Research and Advocacy at Women’s Health in Goulburn North East. We wish them all the best.

On behalf of the ACSSA team

Antonia Quadara
The Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault aims to improve access to current information on sexual assault in order to assist policy makers and others interested in this area to develop evidence-based strategies to prevent, respond to, and ultimately reduce the incidence of sexual assault.

The Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault is funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs through the Women’s Safety Agenda. The Centre is hosted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Contents

Preventing violence against women: Developments in policy 3
Attitudes regarding the perceived culpability of adolescent and adult victims of sexual assault 7
Reflecting on sexual ethics and sexual assault prevention education 13
Literature highlights 19

Preventing violence against women: Developments in policy

By Mary Stathopoulos

A number of initiatives and policy frameworks that address sexual and family violence against women and their children, were launched in 2010. ACSSA provides a summary of two of these initiatives below—from New South Wales and Victoria—along with a summary of an older framework from the Northern Territory. All three share several characteristics in terms of what preventing violence against women involves, including:

- being multi-site (i.e., interventions occur across settings such as schools, communities, and workplaces);
- emphasising primary prevention;
- taking a whole-of-government approach; and
- identifying phased goals.

Stop the Violence, End the Silence: NSW Domestic and Family Violence Action Plan

On 8 June 2010, the New South Wales Government released its Domestic and Family Violence Action Plan (the Stop the Violence Plan) entitled Stop the Violence: End the Silence. The NSW Government invested $50 million toward preventing domestic and family violence and responding more effectively when it does occur. The Stop the Violence Plan will be implemented over 5 years.

The Stop the Violence Plan defines domestic and family violence as including physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, social, economic, and spiritual abuse. It is structured to include strategic directions, priorities, actions and the setting up of monitoring and evaluation systems.

Underlying the Stop the Violence Plan are seven basic principles that were drawn from community and stakeholder consultations:

- Responses must be whole-of-government and whole-of-community.
- Emphasis needs to be on prevention as well as early intervention.
- There should be an emphasis on Aboriginal communities and addressing Aboriginal disadvantage.
- The actions are strategic and flexible so they can be applied at local level.
- Links with other NSW and Federal government initiatives.
- Actions must be backed by evidence-base.
- Actions must work in recognition of the need for program sustainability.

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ACSSA Coordinator: Dr Antonia Quadara

Australian Institute of Family Studies
Level 20, 485 La Trobe Street, Melbourne VIC 3000 Australia
Phone: (03) 9214 7888 Fax: (03) 9214 7839
Internet: www.aifs.gov.au/acssa

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Five strategic action areas have been identified within which some 91 specific actions are organised. These actions have been further organised as immediate, short-term, and long-term goals.

Action areas

- **Prevention and early intervention in domestic and family violence**: This involves targeting a range of sectors and settings—schools, vocational education and training settings, universities, communities, businesses and workplaces—to develop and carry out community education and awareness raising activities. The Stop the Violence Plan also targets individuals or groups who show early signs of either experiencing or using violence, recommending early and effective help, referral and support. Several cross-agency and case management initiatives are identified as immediate actions.

- **Protection, safety and justice**: This strategic area focuses on improving access to the justice system, and on ensuring that women experiencing violence receive consistent, effective responses from the criminal justice system. Specific actions include examining innovation in justice processes and reviewing legislation—including the legal definition of domestic violence. Perpetrator programs are also a focus, with a commitment to considering minimum program standards, culturally competent programs and developmentally appropriate programs.

- **Providing services and support**: A central focus of the Stop the Violence Plan is to provide integrated, coordinated and effective responses to people experiencing domestic and family violence—both from government agencies and non-government organisations. Many of these actions centre on supporting safe housing options for women leaving violence. There is also an emphasis on coordinated crisis or emergency responses, as well as long-term trauma support.

- **Building capacity**: Building capacity involves workforce development, organisational change, and partnership and leadership at the highest levels of key agencies. The sorts of initiatives identified as building capacity include bringing community advocacy networks and government agencies together to inform service delivery, developing avenues for domestic violence committees to inform the work of government agencies, and using government leaders in community awareness raising initiatives. There are also Aboriginal-specific actions for capacity building, such as exploring ways of delivering improved social housing options for large Aboriginal families who are experiencing (or at risk of) domestic and family violence, and working with Aboriginal communities to roll out services.

- **Data and research**: The Stop the Violence Plan regards building the evidence base as critical to best-practice programs, policies and approaches for preventing, reducing and responding to domestic and family violence. Three major types of activities will help build the evidence base—better administrative data collection practices; development of a research agenda on domestic and family violence; and evaluation and monitoring of initiatives.

The priorities emphasised in the Stop the Violence Plan indicate a need to confront family and domestic violence through education, prevention, early intervention, improved responses from the legal sector, and an integrated whole-of-government response.

The Stop the Violence Plan particularly highlights the need for a strong evidence base for implementation of services, and for organisational change to reflect best practice in dealing with the social and economic costs of domestic and family violence. This means that agencies and departments will need to work under
the principles of the Action Plan to create a system that supports victim/survivors across multiple sites.

Barriers to implementation, as expressed in the Stop the Violence Plan, include a difficulty in grasping the full extent of the issues due to inadequate record keeping systems. There is currently no national data collection system from which rich data can be drawn. Legal and community networks vary between and within states, making it difficult to get a clear picture, to protect women and children and to make perpetrators accountable.

The importance of perpetrator accountability through offender programs is also a feature of the Stop the Violence Plan, however, there is recognition that the evaluation of offender programs is hindered by methodological concerns around statistics and best practice. The Stop the Violence Plan also stresses the need for qualitative data of women’s subjective experiences in order to ensure “wraparound” services for the victim/survivors of family and domestic violence. It is due to these knowledge gaps that research and data have been earmarked as important priorities for action and collaboration amongst stakeholders.

In terms of governance, a structure to support the implementation of initiatives will be set up to monitor and evaluate over the 5-year period. The Stop the Violence Plan is headed by the Premier’s office and reporting mechanisms will be established featuring representation from the Minister for Women and the Premier’s Council on Preventing Violence Against Women. Some of the agencies that will be responsible for the implementation of “actions” include the Local Domestic Violence Committees and the Local Council’s Community Safety Committees. An interim evaluation will be carried out at the 2-year mark and a final evaluation of the effectiveness of the program will be completed at the end of the 5-year period.


A Right to Respect: Victoria’s Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women 2010–2020

Also in 2010, the Victorian State Government released A Right to Respect: Victoria’s Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women 2010–2020 (the Right to Respect Plan). The Right to Respect Plan includes a positive vision for healthy relationships, stating as an aspirational goal:

Victorian communities, cultures and organisations are non-violent and gender equitable. Relationships are respectful and non-discriminatory.

The Right to Respect Plan provides a 10-year framework to engage with the underlying factors relevant to family violence and sexual assault. The structure of the Right to Respect Plan reflects the need to create attitudinal and cultural change using a gender-informed ecological approach.¹ The 10-year framework reflects the enormous social and economic burden of violence on women and their children, communities, organisations, and society as a whole. The underlying factors for violence against women as identified in the Right to Respect Plan, and supported by the national and international evidence base (summarised in VicHealth’s 2007 background paper on primary prevention) are:

1 An ecological approach toward primary prevention recognises the individual, community/organisation and the whole of society as three distinct but interrelated spheres that work to reinforce the underlying factors mentioned above.
unequal power relations between men and women;
rigid adherence to gender stereotypes; and
broader cultures of violence.

The Right to Respect Plan is guided by four goals, which can also act as evaluative tools after implementation, they are:

- significant reduction in violence against women;
- non-violent and non-discriminatory social norms;
- gender-equitable, safe and inclusive communities and organisations; and
- equal and respectful relationships between women and men.

These goals are supported by strategies and more immediate priority actions that were earmarked to begin in 2010. The framework identifies five key settings for the establishment, expansion and embedding of the message of respect: education and training; local government, health and community services; sports and recreation; workplaces; and media, arts and popular culture.

All five settings have the capacity to both reproduce social inequalities, but also to challenge them. The education of young people is vital in the goal to create cultural change. The reinforcement of the message through sporting clubs is an important factor in this change. Local governments and health and community services will work toward bringing expertise together in an integrated and cooperative manifestation of the framework. Diversity within the community will be supported by a range of community services targeted toward specific groups, but with a single consistent message of the Right to Respect Plan at the foundation. Further, corporations are increasingly aware of the economic and social benefits of being involved in anti-violence initiatives that support their workforce. Finally, the media, arts and popular culture play an important role in the transmission of social norms. A consistent message of respect supported by the news and entertainment industry serves to bolster the depth and intensity of prevention education. The logic of the Right to Respect Plan is to create a message of respect and non-violence that is consistent across the state of Victoria and eventually embedded as social knowledge shared by all.

In addition to the four goals outlined above, the Right to Respect Plan identifies seven strategies by which to achieve these goals:

- build partnerships and structures across government and non-government agencies;
- strengthen community leadership;
- build capacity and tools for organisational change and workforce development;
- implement communications campaigns and programs, engage champions and undertake media advocacy to promote equity and non-violence;
- develop programs that build respectful relationships and equip people with both skills and knowledge to engage respectfully;
- research and evaluation of policies and programs; and
- use a variety of mechanisms to embed violence prevention and gender equity.

The overall approach of the Right to Respect Plan is multi-sectorial in that the strategies for prevention would need to occur across all five settings identified above. For example, although a school-based prevention program is valuable, it is likely to be more effective when its messages and values are supported and reflected in other sources and settings. It is also a staged process, shifting over 10 years from establishment to expanding and to embedding the messages and the strategies for prevention.

The Right to Respect Plan highlights the importance of men as partners in prevention. It also recognises the specific needs of the Indigenous community and the Victorian Government is currently developing an Indigenous family violence prevention policy alongside the Right to Respect Plan. Further, consideration has been given to the possible social isolation experienced by culturally and linguistically diverse women and the need to target specific prevention messages to minority groups.

Of interest to ACSSA, is the useful resource on what prevention looks like in each of the settings and cases studies that are included in the annex of the Right to Respect Plan.


The Northern Territory launched Building on Our Strengths: A Framework for Action for Women in the Northern Territory (the Building Our Strengths Framework) in 2008. The framework is a 4-year plan aimed at meeting the needs of women and children living in the NT. Although the Building Our Strengths Framework speaks to a broader range of concerns than both the Victorian and New South Wales models, it does concern itself with the elimination of sexual and physical violence against women and their children.

The structure of the framework begins with an overall vision for the women of the Northern Territory: “for all women to have an equal opportunity to reach their full potential to achieve their needs and aspirations”. There are five key priority areas: health and wellbeing; safety; education and employment; participation and leadership; and life balance.

For a specific consideration of sexual assault and domestic violence issues, the key priority area of interest is safety. However all the key priority areas speak to the needs of women who are victim/survivors of sexual abuse. Health and wellbeing is conceptualised as not only the absence of illness, but as the presence of positive markers of health. Culturally appropriate health services for Aboriginal women are an important facet of this priority. Education and employment training opportunities are of vital importance for women who are in the process of separating from dysfunctional relationships due to sexual violence. Participation and leadership acknowledges the advantages of participation in public life and the Building Our Strengths Framework recognises the need for women’s participation to increase. Life balance speaks to the reality of women engaging in paid work outside of the home, unpaid work inside the home and as primary caregivers to dependent children. Initiatives such as job sharing and flexible work arrangements recognise the need for women to balance their responsibilities and achieve leisure time for themselves.

The key priority area of safety is centered on a concern with women’s sexual and physical safety. It addresses the needs of women in the workplace, in public space and in the home. Some of the initiatives that were already underway included:

- domestic and family violence legislation has been passed;
- increase in the number of trained operational staff managing domestic violence related crime; and
- the re-development of night community patrols

Future initiatives identified in the framework involved:

- developing “Stop it Before it Starts”—an anti-violence campaign;
- developing a high level reference group in the Department of Health and Families;
- funding social work positions to support and respond to women presenting with sexual/domestic violence injuries; and
- funding the Sexual Assault Referral Centre.

Both lists above are not exhaustive of the initiatives listed in the framework, however they are illustrative of the direction that the Northern Territory Government is taking in responding to the needs of women and children. Specific services aimed at the Indigenous community indicate the need within that population. Initiatives supporting traditional Indigenous mediation methods in remote areas indicates the level of commitment to be whole-of-population and whole-of-government.

Sexual abuse allegations are notoriously difficult to prosecute (Fitzgerald, 2006; Taylor, 2007). In fact, data from New South Wales indicated that 74% of alleged offenders in sex offence cases against an adult that proceed to trial in the Higher Courts, are acquitted of all charges (Fitzgerald, 2006). For sex offences alleged against a child, the acquittal rate is slightly lower at 61%. In comparison, the acquittal rate across all offences is 30%. Wundersitz (2003) found similar results with regards to sex offences against children in South Australia.

Several reasons have been suggested as to why the conviction rates in sexual assault cases are so low. For example, sexual assault frequently takes place with few or no witnesses other than the victim and the offender and results in what is often referred to as “oath against oath” trials (Taylor, 2007). There is often a lack of evidence beyond the victim’s statement; research has shown that the presence of medical evidence in sexual assault cases perpetrated against children resulted in twice as many guilty pleas or convictions (Bradshaw & Marks, 1990). Regarding criminal offences generally, the strength of evidence tends to be positively associated with successful convictions (Devine, Clayton, Dunford, Seyeing, & Pryce, 2001).

In terms of sexual assault, how the victim is perceived by those involved in the legal decision-making process can affect the legal outcome (Lievore, 2005b; Taylor, 2007). The Victorian Law Reform Commission (VLRC) suggested “juries can be influenced by their own experience and attitudes and may rely on common myths about sexual assault during decision-making” (VLRC, 2004, p. 38). Similarly, researchers have suggested that community attitudes may impact on sentencing in sexual assault cases (Clark, 2008). These attitudes often concern the extent to which victims of sexual assault – both adult and child – are seen as culpable or responsible for their own victimisation.

Adult victims

A significant body of research has examined “victim-blaming” attitudes, which hold that the victim’s behaviour somehow caused the assault. With regards to adult sexual assault victims, undergraduate university students who perceived a victim’s behaviour as sexually provocative attributed increased blame to the victim and were significantly more likely to indicate that the victim had caused her rape (Schult & Schneider, 1991). Another factor contributing to the perceived culpability of the victim is the degree of resistance against the alleged perpetrator. As Easteal (1992) pointed out, one misconception commonly found in the criminal justice system is the perception that the victim must have physically resisted the attack. Similarly, Kopper (1996) found that attributions of rape blame were more prevalent for a victim who did not initially resist the abuse compared to a victim who did resist the abuse from the beginning, based on a sample of undergraduate students. Research regarding the choice of clothes of the victim has indicated that women wearing revealing attire were perceived as having increased the sexual arousal of the perpetrator, which resulted in increased victim culpability by an undergraduate student sample (Maurer & Robinson, 2008). Further, also based on a sample of undergraduate students, Kowalski (1992) found that as the victim’s nonverbal behaviour increased in sexual connotation, attributions of responsibility towards the victim increased. The same trend was observed when the victim failed to say “no” to the sexual advances of the alleged perpetrator.

Child and adolescent victims

Similarly to the findings of adult sexual assault victims, research based on child victims has shown that as children get older they are perceived more negatively. For example, research has indicated that as adolescents approach adulthood, increased culpability is assigned to the victim (Back &
Lips, 1998; Bottoms & Goodman, 1994; Rogers & Davies, 2007). Using a sample of licensed practising psychologists, Kalichman (1992) found that victims of adolescent age were attributed more responsibility for the abuse than 7-year-old victims. As the age of children increases, sexual naïveté of children decreases. This notion suggests that as adolescents become older, they are at greater risk of being perceived as having potentially encouraged the sexual interaction, as indicated by a sample of laypeople (Davies & Rogers, 2009). Further, Maynard & Wiederman’s (1997) findings based on an undergraduate student sample led them to suggest that adolescents were considered more likely to be able to physically resist an act of sexual abuse. In sum, as children develop into adolescents, they are starting to be perceived as “quasi-adults” (Finkelhor, 1984; Maynard & Wiederman, 1997); perhaps as they are increasingly perceived as understanding sexual meanings and therefore as being capable of consenting to sexual activity (Back & Lips, 1998).

While research has indicted that the older a child gets, the more negatively he or she is perceived, little research has investigated how older child victims of sexual abuse are perceived in comparison to adult victims of sexual abuse. There is an increasing understanding around the perceptions about younger, as well as adult, victims of sexual assault, yet little research has focused on “older” children, or adolescents, and their vulnerability to sexual assault as well as to laypeople’s perceptions of their culpability.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the perceptions regarding this age group, and more specifically, the differences and similarities in perceptions of culpability of adolescent in comparison to adult sexual assault victims. Specifically, we predicted a) that misconceptions regarding the culpability of sexual assault victims are prevalent, and b) that a 15-year-old sexually abused female would be perceived similarly to a 20-year-old sexually abused female with regards to the perception of her culpability for the abuse.

Method

Participants

One-hundred-and-seventy-three participants completed the survey, comprised of 53 (31%) males and 120 (69%) females, aged 18 to 60 years of age. Due to the sexual nature of the survey content, participants were required to be at least 18 years of age. Participants were recruited via email using a snowball technique, that is, potential respondents who received an invitation to complete the survey were asked to forward the invitation to other potentially interested respondents.

Materials

Perceptions of Sexual Abuse Questionnaire

The survey comprised 28 questions addressing respondents’ perceptions of, and attitudes towards, a sexually abused 15- or 20-year-old female victim. This paper focuses on one of the constructs that was assessed, namely the degree of culpability assigned to the victim. Culpability was defined as the degree to which the participant perceived the victim as accountable for the abuse and was comprised of items regarding the responsibility, blame, consent and guilt of the victim (Broussard & Wagner, 1988; Kopper, 1996).

Participants were asked to respond to each question based on the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Uncertain, to Agree and Strongly Agree. Two randomised versions of the survey for both age groups (i.e., 15- or 20-year-old) were developed to avoid order effects (i.e. that the ordering of questions or ordering of the two age groups would affect responses to later questions).

Procedure

Each participant was invited via email to participate in the study. Interested participants were prompted to click on a link provided in the email if they chose to participate. Participants were randomly allocated to either version of the survey. Participants were then directed to the Plain Language Statement and were asked to indicate their consent by proceeding to click on the “I agree” option which led to the full survey. Upon completion of the survey, participants were prompted to submit their survey by clicking on the “submit” button. Prior ethics approval for this project was attained by Deakin University.
Results

Child sexual abuse perception items

Descriptive statistics were obtained for each of the perception items. Participant responses as measured by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree were collapsed into three categories. That is, Strongly Disagree and Disagree were collapsed into an overall “Disagree” category, while Strongly Agree and Agree were collapsed into one “Agree” category. Differences between age categories were measured by Chi Square. Significant results are reported at $p < .05$.

The results in Table 1 indicate that the majority of respondents disagreed that a 15-year-old (83%) or a 20-year-old (84%) female who did not physically resist her sexual abuse, can be attributed partial responsibility. Consistent with our hypothesis, there were no significant differences in the perceptions of 15-year-olds and 20-year-olds. With regards to verbally resisting the abuse, an equal majority of participants disagreed that a 15- (78%) or 20-year-old (72%) female who did not verbally resist her sexual abuse, can be attributed partial responsibility. Overall, these finding suggest that there is little difference in the perceived responsibility for her own sexual abuse, when comparing an adolescent to an adult female. However, it is noteworthy that 29% (for the 20-year-old) and 22% of participants (for the 15-year-old) were either unsure, or agreed, that a victim should be attributed partial blame if she did not verbally resist her abuse. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that there may be an expectation of the victim to verbally resist her abuse, despite legislation in several jurisdictions that explicitly rejects this expectation (Taylor, 2007; see also Fileborn 2011).

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that 71% of participants do not blame a 15-year-old female for her abuse, even if she behaved affectionately. A moderately higher proportion blamed a 20 year-old female (81%), however, this difference was not statistically significant. It is interesting to note that, while not statistically significant, this may suggest a trend for 20-year-olds to be perceived more favourably, and less blameworthy than 15-year-olds.

Overall, a victim was seen as more blameworthy if she behaved in what participants thought was a promiscuous, rather than affectionate manner. That is, close to half of all respondents either disagreed or were unsure whether a 15- or 20-year-old should be attributed blame when having behaved promiscuously and there was no significant difference between attitudes to 15- or 20-year-old female. Importantly, these results indicate that 45% of respondents attribute some form of blame if a sexual assault victim behaved “promiscuously”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Responsibility attributed to a 15-year-old and 20-year-old female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility in relation to physical resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 15-year-old female who did not try to physically resist her sexual abuse can be attributed (partial) responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 20-year-old female who did not try to physically resist her sexual abuse can be attributed (partial) responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility in relation to verbal resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 15-year-old female who did not try to verbally resist her sexual abuse can be attributed (partial) responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 20-year-old female who did not try to verbally resist her sexual abuse can be attributed (partial) responsibility.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 More information about the statistical methods used can be obtained from the lead author.
### Table 2: Blame attributed to a 15-year-old and 20-year-old female

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception question</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blame due to acting affectionately</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a 15-year-old female acts affectionately she may invite a sexual act and can be attributed (partial) blame for her sexual abuse</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a 20-year-old female acts affectionately she may invite a sexual act and can be attributed (partial) blame for her sexual abuse</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blame due to having behaved promiscuously</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 15-year-old female should not be attributed (partial) blame for her sexual abuse even if she behaved promiscuously.</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 20-year-old female should not be attributed (partial) blame for her sexual abuse even if she behaved promiscuously.</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: While the use of the word “promiscuous” is problematic, as it implies a negative connotation with regards to female sexuality, the researchers did not define promiscuity in this context and left the interpretation of the word open to the respondents of the study.

### Table 3: Consent associated with a 15-year-old and 20-year-old female

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception question</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consent and criminal offence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a 15-year-old female consents to a sexual act with a legal adult, then the act does not constitute a criminal offence.</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a 20-year-old female consents to a sexual act with a legal adult, then the act does not constitute a criminal offence.</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Implication of consent</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 15-year-old female understands the implications of consenting to sexual acts.</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 20-year-old female understands the implications of consenting to sexual acts.</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4: Guilt attributed to a 15-year-old and 20-year-old female

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception question</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guilt due to having worn revealing clothes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a 15-year-old female wears sexually revealing clothes she can be attributed (partial) guilt for her sexual abuse.</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a 20-year-old female wears sexually revealing clothes she can be attributed (partial) guilt for her sexual abuse.</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guilt due having acted in a sexually provocative manner</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even if a 15-year-old female behaves in a sexually provocative manner, she should not be attributed (partial) guilt if she is sexually abused.</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even if a 20-year-old female behaves in a sexually provocative manner, she should not be attributed (partial) guilt if she is sexually abused.</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results in Table 3 indicate that respondents had some understanding of the law regarding sexual consent. For example, findings show that the majority of participants (90%) agreed that sexual acts between a 20-year-old female and a legal adult did not constitute a crime compared to only 14% in relation to a 15-year-old female. The difference between the two age groups was statistically significant.

Moreover, while the majority of participants (80%) agreed that a 20-year-old female understands the implications of sexual consent, close to half of them (58%) also agreed to this statement when evaluating a 15-year-old female within the same context. Analyses of all participant responses to this perception item found an overall significant difference. Overall results corresponding to consent, suggest there is a difference in public perceptions, regarding the sexual consent of a female mature minor with a legal adult compared to the sexual consent of a 20-year-old female, though well over a third still felt a 15-year old would have the level of understanding to consent to sexual acts.

Results presented in Table 4 indicate that the majority of participants (90%) disagreed with the statement that a 15-year-old who wears sexually revealing clothing should be attributed guilt for her sexual abuse. A similar trend in response patterns was revealed (88%) when a 20-year-old female was evaluated in the same context. These responses were not significantly different.

In addition, approximately two-thirds of participants agreed, that is, if a 15- (69%) or 20-year-old female (64%) behaved in a sexually provocative manner, she should not be attributed guilt. Conversely, 51% (for 15-year-olds) and 36% (for 20-year-olds) of respondents were unsure or disagreed. Analyses for all participant responses to this perception item, revealed no overall significant difference across victim age. Overall results regarding the level of guilt attributed to a victim of sexual assault indicate that more guilt is attributed to a victim who behaved in a sexually provocative manner than who wore sexually revealing clothes.

**Discussion**

Overall, two conclusions can be drawn from this research. Firstly, as predicted, misconceptions regarding the culpability of victims of sexual assault are still common. This finding is somewhat surprising, particularly when considering that the majority of the sample was female, many of whom were university educated. Further, the observation that sexual assault victims are still attributed culpability has historically been associated with a reluctance to report the abuse (Easteal, 1992). It has been estimated that less than 30% of sexual assaults are ever reported (Taylor, 2007). The perception of being blamed for their abuse has served as a barrier to victims accessing formal support systems (Ahrens, 2006; Lievore, 2005a; Ullman & Filipas, 2001).

As a way of addressing these misconceptions, previous research has emphasised that education campaigns regarding sexual assault are needed as primary prevention (Boursnell, Lee, & Chang, 2008; Purvis & Joyce, 2005). The findings of this research are no different. Education campaigns are needed to combat misconceptions about sexual assault, specifically, misconceptions around victim culpability (victim-blaming). Such an education campaign may ultimately lead to a change in perceptions and greater reporting rates.

Secondly, as predicted, our findings indicate that an adolescent victim of sexual assault is perceived similarly to an adult victim of sexual assault (except with regard to consent). While not statistically significant, there seems to be a trend for 15-year-olds to be viewed more negatively than 20-year-olds. This finding is perplexing and can perhaps be attributed to the negative media images of adolescents portrayed in the media. Consequently, it may indeed be the case that, as suggested elsewhere, 10-year-olds are the “ideal” sexual assault witnesses—they are young enough to still maintain some level of sexual naïveté, yet are old enough to be credible witnesses (McCauley & Parker, 2001). Finally, this finding also has implications for the conviction rates of offenders—as the rates for adult victims of assault are even lower than those for child victims (Fitzgerald, 2006), the perception that a 15-year-old is similar to a 20-year-old may have the detrimental consequence of resulting in lower conviction rates compared to younger child victims.

With regards to the limitations of this study, the gender distribution as well as education level of the sample could have been more evenly distributed. That is, respondents were more likely to be female and well-educated. However, given that previous research on perceptions of sexual assault victims has largely been based on convenience samples comprised of undergraduate students, this study has utilised a sample from the general public. Further research based on randomly selected members of the general public using similar methodological techniques as employed in this study and drawn evenly across different generations, could improve knowledge in this area.
In conclusion, our research has indicated that misconceptions about victims of sexual assault are still prevalent. Moreover, older children (i.e., adolescents), are perceived similarly to adult victims of sexual assault. While research comparing these two age groups is still in its infancy, the results show that an education campaign may be beneficial in rectifying these misconceptions and in increasing the level of justice victims receive.

Authors
Dr Bianca Klettke and Sophie Simonis, Deakin University

Address for Correspondence: Dr Bianca Klettke, School of Psychology, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Hwy, Burwood, 3125, Victoria, Australia. Tel: (03) 9244 6774; Fax: (03) 9244 6858.

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Moira Carmody (2003) wrote that many sexual assault prevention strategies were shaped by un-articulated discourses about sexuality that focused primarily on women managing the risk of men’s unethical and sometimes violent behaviour. Carmody argued that we needed an alternative conception of sexual ethics in order to consider how desire, acts and pleasure could be understood from an ethical perspective to create a greater possibility of realising what she called an “erotics of consent”. Since 2006, the idea of sexual ethics has informed a number of prevention education programs with young people, including “Sex and Ethics” developed by Moira Carmody and Karen Willis which is currently delivered in NSW schools and funded through the Australian Government’s Respectful Relationships initiative.

Former ACSSA research officer, Rachel King caught up with two individuals who have been researching responses to, and prevention of, sexual assault for many years and spoke with them about the concept of sexual ethics. In the first interview Rachel asked Dr Michael Flood what sexual ethics meant for engaging men in prevention. In the second, Associate Professor Mary Heath reflected on the limitations of the criminal law in dealing with ethics.

ACSSA: Recently, there have been calls for education regarding sexual ethics. How do you conceptualise this in terms of sexual consent?

Michael Flood: Framing violence prevention education among young people in terms of “sexual ethics” has obvious advantages. The sexual ethics framework is fundamentally oriented towards skill-building. It engages young people as social and sexual agents, inviting processes of critical reflection and negotiation. And it avoids many of the problems of some other violence prevention approaches, particularly those based in narrow sexual prescriptivism or in ineffective pedagogical approaches. Emphasising sexual ethics is an innovative and valuable part of violence prevention work.

The sexual ethics approach sometimes is described as avoiding “telling young people what they should do”, but it does have two normative assumptions. Both are entirely sensible. First, coerced sex and violence are judged to be unacceptable, and ethical reflection and negotiation are seen to make them less likely. Second, there is an implicit assumption that young people should make ethical decisions.

One of the key challenges in violence prevention is working to undermine the discourses of gender and sexuality that feed into violence. The sexual ethics approach recognises this. But it’s not clear that it is any more effective than other violence prevention approaches in enabling people to challenge such discourses through personal reflection or to contribute to wider social change in discourses and power relations.

Finally, a sexual ethics approach may not give us much purchase on unethical or harmful behaviours and relations which are not sexual, such as various forms of social and emotional abuse. Still, a focus on sexual coercion and sexual violence is valuable given the neglect of these in some prevention programming.

A sexual ethics approach has real strengths. It focuses on skills development, offering a clear behavioural message, and the evidence is that such programs are more effective than those focused only on attitudes. It gives a language with which to make ethical choices and construct ethical relations. It invites a positive standard of consent, arrived at through reflection and negotiation. And it makes room for young people to arrive at a variety of (ethical) sexual involvements, from intimate monogamy to casual sex to no sex at all. If done well, other approaches focused on “healthy” or “respectful” relationships have similar strengths.
ACSSA: Historically, it has been a woman’s responsibility to communicate either her consent or non-consent to sexual activity. Increasingly, a "positive standard" of "free agreement" is being called for, and also the centrality of men’s role in managing and negotiating this agreement. What do you think are the key factors in ensuring men are aware of, and active in, negotiating free agreement in their sexual interactions?

Michael Flood: The shift in law towards a positive standard of consent is to be welcomed. To some degree, it holds potential perpetrators of sexual assault to a higher standard, in which they must take reasonable steps to ensure consent. It recognises the power relations within which sexual relations may take place. And it moves the law away from a traditional construction of heterosexuality in which women give in to male "seduction". At the same time, it’s clear that in practice, the use of a positive standard of consent in sexual assault cases has not eliminated victim-blaming.

In everyday sexual relations, there are real challenges in establishing a positive standard of consent based on voluntary agreement. Above all, a negative standard of consent, based only on the absence of overt resistance among women to men’s sexual advances, remains a powerful social norm. This is wrapped up in wider constructions of gender and sexuality based in notions of uncontrollable male sexuality, female sexual passivity and subservience, a sexual double standard, and male sexual entitlement.

Focusing on young men for a moment, it’s obvious that a significant minority—around one in seven—does tolerate or condone sexual violence. From a 2001 survey of 12–20-year-olds, 14% of males (but only 3% of females) agreed that "It’s okay for a boy to make a girl have sex with him if she has flirted with him or led him on", and 15% of males (but only 4% of females) agreed that “It is okay to put pressure on a girl to have sex but not to physically force her” (Attorney-General’s Department, 2001).

Among Australians in general, the recent National Community Attitudes Survey found that over one-third of men (and close to one-third of women) agreed that rape results from men “not being able to control their need for sex” (VicHealth, 2010).

It is vital that we invite men to take on routine practices of positive consent. Many young men rely on problematic indicators such as the absence of resistance, body language, or previous or current sexual activity. Some simply do not care whether or not the woman is consenting, or even find forced sex arousing. We need to teach young men (and young women) not only how to do consent, but why it is important. Among young men most invested in notions of male sexual entitlement, the biggest obstacle to practising consent is not that they don’t know how, but they do not feel the need to do so.

Sexual pressure and coercion are normalised and often invisible. Given this, both men and women participate in sexual relations which are experienced as, at best, uncomfortable and unwanted and, at worst, assaultive. Yet neither party names such interactions as rape or violence. Encouraging a positive model of consent will require a determined effort to deconstruct the wider scaffolding for negative consent and sexual coercion, based in particular in constructions of masculine sexuality and masculinity.

There are tricky questions here. How do we deal with the “grey” areas in and around unwanted sex, for example where women consent to sex because they don’t want to be seen as “frigid”, they don’t have the energy to avoid doing so, or they care for a partner who really wants to? Should explicit verbal negotiation be the standard for every sexual interaction, or can this be relaxed between sexual partners in established relationships? What does it mean to claim that some women are raped and do not know it?

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3 A positive standard has been likened to the Canadian “affirmative standard”. A positive standard is defined as one in which individuals can demonstrate free and voluntary consent. An example of this change is that passivity is no longer demonstration of consent.

4 Free agreement is when consent is expressed to sexual interaction where no other circumstances or factors have impinged upon the consenter’s ability to give informed and free agreement to the sexual interaction they are about to partake in.
ACSSA: You are a passionate proponent of involving men in preventing and eliminating violence against women. What do you see as the real achievements of organisations such as Men Against Sexual Assault and primary prevention programs that target men and boys?

Michael Flood: There are some real achievements that deserve mention. As I have written elsewhere, such efforts have had some success in raising public and political awareness of the role of men and boys in ending violence against women. For example, the White Ribbon Campaign has achieved substantial institutional presence and support, as well as significant media coverage and community awareness. While early grassroots efforts in Men Against Sexual Assault and other anti-sexist groups in the 1980s and 1990s have died off, there’s also been some recent increase in men’s grassroots organising.

There is growing sophistication in violence prevention education aimed at boys and young men. Some powerful masculine organisations and workplaces have become involved in violence prevention, including national sporting codes and companies. And new partnerships have been forged between women’s and men’s networks and organisations.

On the other hand, contemporary efforts involving men and boys in preventing violence against women are also limited. Education programs are scattered and under-developed, and few have been well evaluated. The White Ribbon Campaign has lost some opportunities to produce effective marketing campaigns, and it could do more to engage and train men in sustainable forms of activism. And, more than anything, the problem remains that few men actually take up the cause of preventing violence against women. This is further compounded by the possibility they may be outnumbered by the number of men campaigning against feminist-inspired efforts to prevent violence against women.

ACSSA: You have stated that programs and campaigns involving men should be based on feminist principles. In a society that increasingly sees feminism as an “F-word”, how do you make these principles palatable for general audiences?

Michael Flood: A feminist framework is vital both because it anchors the political and ethical commitments of our work and because it reflects the best available scholarship and activism on these issues. But yes, the obvious problem is that there is considerable ignorance of and hostility to feminism in the community. I see a few strategies as relevant here.

First, focusing on efforts engaging men, we can foster men’s support for and commitment to gender equality in a whole range of ways: appealing to their love and care for the girls and women in their lives, generating awareness of and empathy for women’s experiences, making comparisons with other forms of inequality or unjust power, and so on. It can be useful to approach males as partners in solving the problem, address men as bystanders to other men’s sexism or violence, invite men to take responsibility rather than accept blame, create safe spaces for reflection, use male facilitators, and acknowledge men’s own victimisation. Of course, there will still be resistance and defensiveness. And if there’s none of this, then I’m not sure that we’re really doing the work of challenging powerful social norms and inequalities.

In communities in general, we face the challenge that while there is widespread agreement with the principle of gender equality, there is also discomfort with feminism. For example, young women have confident expectations of gender equality, and at the same time many reject the identity or label “feminist”. Some have been persuaded by media stereotypes of feminism as anti-male or as about being a victim. Fear of feminism is fuelled too by homophobia, a rejection of and disinterest in the political and reluctance to take on a public political stance, lack of experience of overt discrimination,
fear of complexity and thinking, and reluctance to explore one’s own position in multiple systems of domination. Men’s discomfort towards feminism is fuelled by many of the same factors, but above all by feminism’s challenge to sexism and male power and the unease and defensiveness this can generate.

I’m all for working to make feminist politics and theory relevant and meaningful for men and women alike. I’m all for using accessible language, inspiring imagery, and smart strategy to educate, energise, and mobilise. I’m nervous though about the idea of making feminism more “palatable”, as this could involve dulling its radical edge, its fundamental challenge to gender and sexual inequalities. Still, there are good examples out there—books, blogs, speakers, campaigns, and more—which engage ordinary women and men and which invite them into feminism’s worlds of insight and inspiration.

Interview with Associate Professor Mary Heath
Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law, Flinders Law School

ACSSA: Recently, there have been calls for education regarding sexual ethics. How do you conceptualise sexual ethics, in terms of sexual consent?

Mary Heath: Consent is a very impoverished vocabulary for discussing and thinking about sexual ethics. It may be appropriate to focus on consent in the criminal law, where the basic project is to describe conduct so fundamentally inappropriate that it can rightly be called criminal. However, the project of ethics should be wider and deeper than talking about “consent”. Consent is too minimal a standard for it to be all that is necessary for ethical engagement in sex.

Sexual ethics should extend to talking about what we might want or need to negotiate sex that is actively desired, exciting, pleasurable and satisfying. What skills might be necessary? What circumstances might be required? What should happen if anyone involved is unsure, changes his or her mind about something, and wants to slow down or stop? It should involve consideration of each person's wellbeing and how they can ensure that sex is a valuable part of their own thriving in the world, as well as involving care for sexual partners and how sexuality can contribute to their wellbeing.

I think we need to ask how we can have richer conversations, verbally and nonverbally, about what we want, not only about what we don’t want. Conversations about coercive sexuality have suffered due to the absence of rich conversations about mutually desired sexuality. Public debates around young people’s sexuality still focus on what they should try to prevent (e.g., STIs, pregnancy) and on what counts as “wrong” sex. Media coverage of research on young people’s sexual lives tends to convey a rather horrified tone rather than inquiring into whether young people have the information they need and the skills and resources necessary to organise to have the sex they want and not to have the sex they don’t want. Older people are thought to be beyond education, despite the lack of evidence that we have the skills and information that we might need.

ACSSA: Your research interests include teaching rape law effectively. How do you think communities could aim to teach sexual ethics effectively?

Mary Heath: These are quite different projects. Other people, such as Moira Carmody, have much more informed places from which to answer this question. We can all participate in conversations about the diversity of human experience about sexuality and about ethics. We need conversations that inquire into what people currently do to negotiate ethical sex. However, we also need conversations about the skills and knowledge each of us bring to the project of negotiating ethical sex; where those skills and that
knowledge come from; and how we can build them up. There need to be opportunities to acknowledge that this is a process which involves emotion as well as desire and thinking; and where there can be space to talk about the diversity of those emotions—embarrassment, fear and shame, as well as delight and joy.

In classes where I am teaching about rape law and in public settings where sexual violence is being discussed, I have found that people are keen to have these conversations. Given an opportunity, they will engage enthusiastically and thoughtfully. In contrast to public scaremongering about young people’s sexual lives, acknowledging that sexual coercion is a reality in our society opens up a space for positive conversations about ethical sex where judgement about other people’s sexual choices is no longer the dominant framing of the discussion.

ACSSA: What do you see as the implications from the use of the terms such as "technical rape"?

Mary Heath: The expression “technical rape” surely implies that there are real rapes and rapes in name only. Discussion of issues such as this in the media and online shows that we still have a long way to go to achieve a social consensus that if a woman withdraws her consent to sex, or becomes unable to consent (by becoming unconscious or falling asleep, for example) that withdrawal should be recognised by her sexual partner as well as by the law. I say “woman” because this continues to be an overtly gendered public discussion in which men never want or need to discontinue sex and women indicate sexual interest at their own risk.

We often see prosecutors give insufficient attention to consulting the complainant—prosecuting authorities who are negotiating with the defence struggle to accept that the complainant’s interests may not be identical with those of the prosecution. The complainant may have priorities more important to her or him than achieving a conviction.

Research in Australia by Denise Lievore (2003) and in the US by Amanda Konradi (Konradi, 1996, 1997) has already shown that Australia is not alone in struggling to figure out how to address these realities. It also stresses the potential for very poor outcomes when they are not addressed well.

ACSSA: What do you see as the limitations inherent in current sexual assault and sexual consent legislation?

Mary Heath: Their incapacity to make up for the deficiencies of political commitment, funding, policing, prosecution and court processes is an inherent limitation, despite the huge progress that has been made since the 1970s. If certainty and speed of conviction is crucial to crime prevention, we should not be surprised that criminal justice processes have not made an observable difference to rates of reported victimisation.

However, far more significant is legislation’s incapacity to eradicate social contexts and attitudes that allow sexual assault to thrive. Sexual coercion flourishes in all the places where some people have power over others, whether because of gender, age, ethnicity, immigration status, disability, institutionalisation or other factors. Rape thrives in environments where any human can be treated without complete respect, particularly where that can happen with impunity.

ACSSA: How do we achieve recognition of ethical sexual conduct in rape law?

Mary Heath: I am not sure this is the task. The criminal law does not try to describe ethical conduct in any area of human behaviour, but to set a line beyond which conduct will be criminally penalised. Most people recognise that behaviour that is unethical will not always be criminal. Few of us depend on the criminal law to tell us what is ethical.

The task is to raise our expectations about what is possible—enough to be having public (as well as private) conversations about achieving ethical sexuality rather than only ever having conversations about avoiding criminal sexual acts.

ACSSA: Can amendments in legislation achieve the revolution needed to eliminate sexual violence against women?

Mary Heath: No. Laws should certainly be changed to respond to identifiable deficiencies. However, decades of legislative change in this area clearly show that it is not sufficient to end sexual violence. While useable laws are desirable and law reform can remove profound barriers to responding to violence
against women, children and men, law reform is incapable of eradicating sexual offending.

Laws are not self-activating. A revolution in social attitudes and practices will be necessary, not just a change to the words of statutory pages. Law only comes into the picture when violence has already happened. Even the effective implementation of the laws we now have would require huge changes: people who are sexually coerced would need to be able to recognise their experiences as rape, and as a crime. They would need to be confident that they would be treated as performing a public service by reporting the offence against them rather than being stigmatised and disbelieved. Policing, prosecution, the conduct of defence lawyers and court personnel would all need to change to bring about that outcome. These agencies would need more resources in order to allow continuity of investigation and prosecution, shorter waiting times for trial and better communication. And of course, potential offenders would need to be able to make the decision not to persist and to be able to access what resources they would need to stop using violence in this way.

I think moving the public conversation away from the rather barren territory of “consent” and into something that might enable people to envision what sex without coercion could be, how to organise it and to refuse to participate in anything less, would be a good start.

ACSSA: Each Australian state has different sexual assault law. Do you think a particular state’s response is more effective? Which elements of legislation make it most appropriate?

Mary Heath: Every state and territory has better law on this subject than they did 20 years ago. We are now in a period where the precise language of the statute is unlikely to be at the heart of any major hurdle to conviction. We need to squarely face … that the language of the statute is not the only issue and that implementation and attitudes continue to erode the effectiveness of the laws we currently have. I would rate Victoria the jurisdiction with the greatest demonstrated commitment to continuing review of the operation of the law, involvement of multiple stakeholders in that review process, and repeated action on evaluation that shows that the law is not producing the outcomes that it was intended to produce.

ACSSA: Recently you stated, “The purpose of the law is to safeguard sexual autonomy and ensure no one but the person involved gets to decide whether or not they have sex”. How do you envision the law achieves safeguarding sexual autonomy in situations where consent is given under duress, or other situations in which agreement is not actually free agreement?

Mary Heath: The law is a blunt instrument. Despite my statement, it cannot safeguard autonomy but only penalise serious violations of that autonomy. Australian laws now recognise a wide range of circumstances which may invalidate any apparent consent to sex, and in this way the law seeks to recognise that sometimes people agree to sex in circumstances that do not amount to “free agreement”. Laws all over the country recognise a range of circumstances in which free agreement (or consent) is not present and treat sex in these circumstances as rape. However, there is already evidence both in Australia and elsewhere that these provisions do not work as well as they could. So the law may aspire to safeguard sexual autonomy. Parliaments across the country have indicated that they share this aspiration, as do those of us who have campaigned for law reform. However, I am not naïve enough to hold out that this goal is being achieved.

References

At the time of writing Dr Rachel King was a Research Officer with ACCSA
Literature highlights

Compiled by Carole Jean, Librarian

The following are a selection of resources addressing current issues in the sexual violence field. In this edition of Aware, we focus on surviving sexual assault trauma and dementia and also on prevention campaigns and media. ACSSA receives many of these resources. Print resources are available via the interlibrary loan system. Contact your local library for details. Electronic resources are available directly via the web address. The inclusion of a publication in this list does not necessarily mean that it is endorsed by ACSSA.

Evaluation in the sexual assault field


This book provides comprehensive guidelines and field-tested tools for direct service evaluation programs. It also chronicles and celebrates over 30 years of progress made by the anti-violence movement. The author offers practical information while identifying key issues and placing them in the broader context of social and political change.


A number of reports have indicated that the rate of sexual violence in many Indigenous communities is high. The belief that both authorities and mainstream sexual assault services will not respond appropriately has been identified as one amongst several issues that may impede Aboriginal women from seeking assistance. This project uses highly consultative and Indigenous specific methodology to identify strategies to meet the needs of Indigenous victim/survivors of sexual assault, and Indigenous and mainstream service providers, including training and education needs for service providers. The study focuses on the Metropolitan Melbourne area, East Gippsland and Barwon Region in Victoria, Australia.


This impact evaluation assesses the Albuquerque Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner services in the areas of healthcare, victim services, law enforcement, and prosecution. The evaluation compares the experiences of women who sought services at the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center in the two years prior to the inception of the SANE program with those of women who sought services at the Albuquerque SANE Collaborative from its inception in October 1996 through to the end of 1999. The report concludes that the “data strongly suggest that a SANE unit greatly enhances the healthcare quality of women who have been sexually assaulted, improves the quality of forensic evidence, improves law enforcement’s ability to collect information and to file charges, and increases the likelihood of successful prosecution.


This report provides a brief history of the development of Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) in Great Britain, and outlines the services provided by three such centres: St Mary’s in Manchester, REACH in Northumbria, and STAR in West Yorkshire. It assesses the range of services available and the way in which they are provided by each of the centres, and compares them with other models of service provided in areas without SARCs. The focus of the report is on the comparison of access to services; forensic examination; follow-up medical services; and support, advocacy, and counselling. The study includes assessments of SARCs by both service users and service providers, outlines areas for
improvement, and concludes with a proposed model for an “ideal” SARC.


The report Framing Best Practice: National Standards for the Primary Prevention of Sexual Assault Through Education recommended the development of the National Sexual Assault Prevention Education Standards to provide a framework to guide current and new programs in developing “best practice” based on international and local research evidence. In this issues paper, three of the authors of that report discuss a number of challenges that programs are likely to face in the effort to formulate best practice in sexual assault prevention education. The discussion is based on findings from interviews conducted with 32 prevention educators and program writers during a research project in which questions were asked about program development. Some of the challenges include: the distinctiveness of the prevention education role, conceptual underpinnings in programs, program development and evaluation, working in schools, choosing a pedagogical approach to work with young people, and program adaptation for the purposes of cultural relevance.


This book, for professionals working with sexually abusive adolescents and children with harmful sexual behaviours, reviews key research studies on abnormal and abusive sexual behaviour and intervention strategies. It aims to present an accessible review of key findings for practice.


Building Generations is a parenting program designed for female adult survivors of intra-familial sexual assault, developed by the Incest Survivors Association. This article describes and reviews the program. It finds that Building Generations is an invaluable tool for practitioners who work with female adult survivors of incest in a group context. In addition, the overall program objectives offer important benefits for female survivors, not only in providing an opportunity to validate their own experiences, but also in providing them with necessary parenting skills and the confidence to use them. The article suggests that the program could be usefully extended to include male survivors and survivors of extra-familial sexual abuse.


Comparing rates of recidivism of treated offenders with those predicted by risk assessment tools, this evaluation of 13 treatment programs for sexual offenders (adults and adolescents) in Australia and New Zealand finds that all but one are effective in reducing sexual recidivism. In terms of general treatments available, a proportion of sex offenders (high-risk violent sex offenders and those who deny responsibility for their offences) generally bypasses treatment, and they may be more susceptible to extended detention or supervision orders if considered a high risk of re-offending upon release. The report argues that the development of a community-based program for high-risk sex offenders released on bond would help to address such gaps in treatment. The evaluation of treatments in New Zealand indicates that the incorporation of traditional and holistic forms of treatment is effective in reducing sexual recidivism among Maori offenders, though this has not been determined in Australian Indigenous offenders.


An outcome of a project to establish best practice criteria for the evaluation of school based violence prevention programs, this literature review considers international and New Zealand research identifying programs that: model and teach healthy relationships within the classroom and playground; focus on the school culture as a whole and aim to make it peaceful; lead or contribute to community wide programs aimed at reducing violence; identify and help to change students with antisocial behaviour; prevent children from inflicting or suffering bullying, dating violence, family maltreatment, child sexual abuse and sexual violation or rape; and equip students to avoid inflicting or suffering intimate partner violence and maltreating children when they become adults.

This research report investigates outcomes of the Jacaranda Project 2002–2004, a group-work program for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The report provides an overview of the achievements and evaluation of the Jacaranda Project, and discusses the quantitative and qualitative methodology used. The report discusses group participants’ and group leaders’ views, summary findings and conclusions as to the value and benefits of the project. It also includes various questionnaires, information sheets and forms, and a literature review of childhood sexual abuse.


Respond SA is a service for adult survivors of childhood sexual assault. In this interview, the manager of Respond SA and a manager at Relationships Australia discuss the establishment of Respond SA and its key aims and objectives; the service delivery frameworks and models that were used in the development of Respond SA; why survivors of childhood sexual abuse have been under-served; the specific needs of adult survivors; whether Respond SA could be modelled in other areas of Australia; the research that is needed concerning the effects of childhood sexual abuse; the services that Respond SA offers; Respond SA’s participation in the workforce development of staff in other agencies; the evaluation of Respond SA; and the success of Respond SA so far.


The Sexual Offences Awareness Program (SOAP) was a school-based pilot initiative, developed between police, community services and local schools. It involved two lesson plans that could be presented by police with teacher support within secondary schools. It aimed to raise young people’s awareness of sexual assault and dangerous situations, promote behaviours which would reduce their exposure to potential assaults, and advise them of the rights of and support services for victims of sexual assault. The evaluation was based primarily on pre and post surveys administered to students which measured changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviours, particularly in relation to parties and events involving alcohol and drug use.


This report evaluates the Polish Domestic Violence Support Group project conducted between June and December 2004 called “Before it’s Too Late”, from the perspective of participants and the program facilitator. It was found that the program and the implemented therapeutic interventions made a significant and positive impact and improved the emotional wellbeing, sense of safety and belonging for all participants. It also reduced the fear of social rejection and stigma attached to victims of domestic violence.


A paper that provided a review of the current state of treatment programs for young people with sexually abusive behaviours in Australia and New Zealand is summarised here. The article discusses gaps in service delivery, the need for the earliest possible identification of and intervention with these children, the legal system, therapeutic approaches, and the need for effective evaluation and ongoing research.


There has been considerable growth in the adoption of restorative justice practices in Australia and internationally. This paper describes and evaluates claims made about restorative justice, or victim-offender mediation, including the claimed benefits for victims, offenders and communities; general concerns about restorative justice practices; and an overview of evaluations. Restorative justice is then considered for use with domestic or family violence cases and other gendered harms such as sexual assault, including a review of models currently being used around the world. Indigenous communities and the use of restorative justice and alternative justice practices in cases of family violence are also discussed.

A risk assessment tool that has been developed specifically for Indigenous sexual and violent offenders is reported on in this paper. The paper discusses problems associated with over-representation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system and the lack of Australian risk assessment instruments. It considers the results of the study, which suggest that it will be necessary to develop separate instruments for violent and sexual offenders, and also for subgroups of these two groups.


These guidelines are intended to assist workers and consumers in the mental health, sexual assault and disability sectors in Queensland. They provide a framework for the development of local area policy and procedures to address issues relating to sexual assault and sexual safety within Queensland Health acute care, extended treatment and medium and high secure inpatient mental health services. The guidelines cover: gender, mental illness and sexual violence; sexual assault; responding to a report of recent sexual assault; past sexual assault and abuse; sexual harassment; sexual safety; risk assessment; assessment vulnerability; identifying and responding to sexually disinhibited behaviours; policies regarding sexual relationships; sexual relationships between staff and clients; impaired capacity; clients under 16 years; diverse needs; safety in design of mental health services; follow up support; confidentiality and documentation; staff support and education; education for clients and family members; services access, availability and promotion; and evaluation.


An evaluation of the Australian Sexual Offenders Treatment Program (SOTP), a program based on cognitive behavioural principles and aiming to reduce sexual offence recidivism, examined the recidivism rate among a target group of offenders over a period of 5 years. The article reviews the research evaluating sexual offender programs, describes the SOTP, discusses difficulties with the data and methodology, and summarises the findings of the evaluation of SOTP. The analysis shows no significant reduction in recidivism among the SOTP target group. The authors emphasise the importance of the continued evaluation of sex offender programs and the use of longitudinal data.


This report looks at the international literature on recidivism rates and risk factors that predict re-offending by offenders of adult sexual assault. The review revealed differing rates of measured recidivism, from 2% up to 35%. Victorian police data on persons apprehended for sexual assault of adults in 2001 were also analysed to identify recidivism rates. An overview of sex offender treatment programs run through Australian corrective services, and a summary of the literature on the efficacy of sex offender treatment programs is also included.


Summarising what is known and what is not known about sexual violence in Australia, this report discusses the effects of sexual violence; the experience of sexual assault; the role of the criminal justice system; statistics and literature review on sex offenders; therapeutic interventions for victims of sexual violence and for sex offenders; early intervention; community education; and evaluation of interventions. The appendix contains results from overseas crime victims surveys.


These guidelines provide a best practice framework for responding to adult victims of sexual assault. They are designed to improve responses by promoting increased interagency cooperation and coordination and to help departmental and agency personnel understand one another’s roles and responsibilities. They cover the roles of key government departments, including Queensland Health, Queensland Police Service and Office Of The Director Of Public Prosecutions; an interagency approach; teamwork; training; information provision; referrals; evaluation; access, availability and promotion of services;
Human rights


Sexual assault, domestic and family violence are human rights violations, harming and limiting the lives of one third of Australian women. This report states that no woman should be a victim of domestic and sexual violence, and it focuses on strategies and actions of early intervention, prevention, improved services and justice. The report makes recommendations designed to confront the unacceptable level of injustice against women, and it gives both governments and communities a plan of action that need to be implemented to ensure safety, equality and justice for Australian women.


In this interview, Nicola Henry discusses her research into the issue of rape in wartime. She examines the relationship between wartime rape, collective memory and the law. Henry explores the role of international criminal trials in shaping collective memory (either by silence or recognition) and then considers the consequences of sensationalising the issue or maintaining silence about it. She outlines the complex reasons that explain why men rape during wartime and the shortcomings of formal legal procedures in achieving justice for the survivors. The interview also discusses non-legal means of recognition and social justice for survivors of wartime rape when legal avenues are inadequate.


Recent cases concerning the sexual assault of young Aboriginal girls in the Northern Territory have raised national attention on issues facing Aboriginal victims of sexual assault. This serious issue of discrimination within the criminal justice system is a longstanding one that requires immediate political will and action. The overriding principle of equality before the law demands nothing less. This article examines discrimination in examples of cases involving the sexual assault of Aboriginal girls that were heard by the Northern Territory Supreme Court. It discusses cultural justifications, equality and human rights.


What are the key issues to tackle if progress is to be made in addressing family violence and sexual abuse in Indigenous communities? Selected recommendations from a 2006 report by the Secretary General of the United Nations on violence against children are outlined as a useful framework for child protection activities in New South Wales. The paper then discusses the Australian context and the response to the final report of the Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce. It concludes by outlining ten challenges for addressing family violence and sexual abuse in Indigenous communities.


Trafficking in human beings is large-scale and growing. It is a human rights abuse as well as a crime crossing international, national and regional jurisdictions. Trafficking is used for a wide variety of purposes,
such as domestic, agricultural or sweatshop labour, marriage and prostitution. Australia is a destination country for victims of trafficking, and evidence suggests the majority are women trafficked into debt-bonded prostitution. Recent years have seen many changes in international and national responses to, and legislation on, trafficking in persons. In this paper we review some of the theoretical approaches to trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, as well as examine the current legislative, policy and service responses. We aim to provide an overview of recent developments and navigate the varied and often opposing modes of analysis surrounding the issue. Overall, ACSSA intends this paper to serve as an informative resource for services, policy makers and researchers on the subject of trafficking in women for sexual exploitation in Australia.


This article examines some of the historic and contemporary debates surrounding women’s human rights. Women’s rights activists have effectively challenged and expanded traditional interpretations of human rights, which has affected the development of Amnesty International’s own approach to the human rights of women. The development of this approach from its beginnings to the recently launched Stop Violence Against Women campaign is briefly traced in this article. One of the basic tenets, and great strengths, of the campaign is the “due diligence approach”, by which governments and other authorities are held responsible for upholding women’s human rights. The last section of this article specifically examines the applications of the due diligence approach to sexual assault.


The author discusses the protection of the human rights of all involved in sexual assault cases. He outlines international declarations and conventions that uphold human rights, and discusses to what extent the ways in which sexual assault offences are prosecuted in domestic law raise human right implications. He states the need for a balance to be struck so that victims are not revictimised and the legitimate rights of accused persons and others involved in the process are not infringed.


The focus of this article is domestic violence and the legal issue of women’s and children’s international human rights in the Pacific and the strategies for their implementation, particularly in the Independent State of Samoa. The author considers the difficulties and issues relating to implementation in that context and suggests directions for future action by both state and non-state actors.


This article describes domestic violence and how it is tackled in Norway. Norway has a welfare state where the social rights are mainly universal and the responsibility taken by the state for the inhabitants’ welfare is relatively wide. The article draws a picture of the more specific measures directed to women who experience domestic violence and of general welfare services which are particularly important for these women. It ends with reflections on whether politics and welfare regimes matter.


In this examines how feminist activists in Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand have strategically used the discourse of human rights to create a space for women’s rights to be recognised. With economic development designated as critical to the future health of these nations, attention is drawn to the particular challenges confronting feminists in South East Asia as they mobilise against domestic violence and sexual assault.