# NGO CSW65 Virtual Forum

# DCA Presents: Myth busting domestic violence at work

# 18 March 2021

DAVID MORRISON:

To everyone who is watching this around Australia, good afternoon or good morning. To our international guests who are watching this panel discussion, hello and welcome to Australia. My name is David Morrison. I am the Chair of the Diversity Council Australia board, I've been lucky enough to do that for over five years now.

It's a wonderful organisation and I have been a board member for a number of years for Our Watch, and we partner with DCA to bring together our part of CSW and the focus today is Myth Busting Domestic Violence at Work.

I would like to start the way all meetings now in Australia start by acknowledging our First People and I will introduce the speaker to do that, Aunty Donna Ingram, a proud Wiradjuri woman from here in Sydney, a pivotal figure in our Australian community but also a great member of our Indigenous community here in Sydney and she will provide to all of us a Welcome to Country.

## DONNA INGRAM:

It's my pleasure to be here with permission from my Elders to offer Welcome to Country to Myth Busting Domestic Violence at Work produced in conjunction with Our Watch. It gives me pride to represent my community at this important cultural protocol, it shows respect for and recognition of the unique position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australian culture.

We are presenting to you from the traditional land of the Gadigal, one of 29 clans of the Eora nation, bordered by the Hawkesbury, Georges and Nepean rivers. I proudly identify with the Wiradjuri Nation. I was born on Gadigal land and I've had the privilege to live, work and raise my four children on this land for most of my life.

I have experienced family and domestic violence and physical and verbal violence and understand the impact it can have on a person, the children, family, community and workplace. I'm proud to say I left toxic relationships and I feel happier and healthier.

That happiness is also because my family has grown and I'm now a proud grandmother to Aaliyah, Kelila, Leikota and Elijah. I acknowledge the Gadigal, spirits and ancestors and thank them for their ongoing custodianship, I pay my respects to Elders, past and present, we must never forget the sacrifices made by our leaders. I pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders from all clans and nations represented today.

I recognise our non-Aboriginal sisters and brothers who walk beside us to support victims of domestic violence in the workplace. At this point I would normally say I offer you a warm and sincere welcome to the land of the Gadigal of the Eora nation and wish you a safe state and safe travelling from the land, I wish you well wherever you are.

I wish you an interesting and informative time here where Lisa Annese will present the findings from the guidelines and outline the myths and misconceptions about family violence at work. I look forward to hearing from David Morrison and the panel about the impact of domestic and family violence on workplace safety, the cost to business and the unique role business can play in prevention.

In closing we remember this is, was, and always will be Aboriginal land. Thank you.

## DAVID MORRISON:

Thank you, Donna. I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are calling in from, I am in Sydney, Gadigal land of the Eora nation and on behalf of DCA and participants in today's panel I want to pay respects to the traditional custodians, Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have made an important contribution to this land and community. This land was, is, and always will be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land.

The DCA is delighted to participate in the 65th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, to bring this parallel event. We are proud to partner with Our Watch. Before I introduce the CEO of DCA Lisa Annese, I want to share a few tips with you about today's webinar.

To join the conversation, you can use hashtag #DVatWork or follow @DivCouncilAus. To view the live captions on your smart phone, go to www.ai-live.com and enter the session ID AUDCAG1803A. And there you can use the chat function to ask questions to everyone and we will hopefully have time to turn ourselves to the questions you want to ask our esteemed panel.

The event recording will be available on the DCA website following the event. I would like to introduce Lisa, Lisa Annese has been CEO of the Diversity Council Australia since 2014. Under her leadership DCA delivers innovative diversity practice resources for Australian businesses and support them in improving their inclusion capability and leads debate on Diversity & Inclusion in the public arena.

In 2018 Lisa was named one of the Australian Financial Review 100 Women of Influence and in 2019 she was elected to the board of Amnesty International Australia. Lisa I will invite you to present the guidelines that have been drawn up with Our Watch.

## LISA ANNESE:

Thank you so much, David, lovely to be here with everyone, to our audience in Australia, lovely to connect with you all again. No doubt we have connected before. A very warm welcome to everyone connecting with us internationally.

I feel really privileged to be able to present the findings of the project that the DCA did with Our Watch. We know that domestic and family violence is a critical issue for the workplace, especially as COVID-19 continues to blur the line between the home and office.

If an employee is living with or using domestic and family violence it will have an impact on the workplace through absenteeism, presenteeism and the cost of replacement hiring, not to mention there can be a reluctance on the part of some organisations to address an issue that for so long was seen as something purely in the domain of the home.

In this presentation I will explore some of the common myths about family and domestic violence and the workplace. As one of the places where we spend a large part of our lives, work places have an important role in raising awareness, challenging sexist attitudes and behaviour, reinforcing gender equality or inequality even, modelling respectful relationships, as well as providing a safe space from violence and a crucial source of social and economic support for people experiencing violence.

A quick note on language. I will be using the term domestic and family violence to describe violence that occurs between intimate partners and family members, as it is the most accessible and relevant term for workplaces. It is important for me to state at the outset that in the resource we produced, we recognised the gendered nature of DMV and we noted that this is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women and that represents a large proportion of violence against women in Australia.

In the report we have produced as well as the presentation today, I will be using terms such as a victim and person experiencing domestic and family violence as well as perpetrator and person using domestic and family violence interchangeably, where appropriate and sometimes for brevity. But I recognise this approach is not without contention and although socially recognised the term victim can be problematic as it can suggest people are helpless or lack the capacity to make rational choices about how to respond to the violence.

We apologise if this causes offence but that is not our intention.

The first myth we identified is that domestic and family violence doesn't have anything to do with the workplace. In reality the term domestic and family violence suggests a pattern of behaviour occurring in the home and many workplaces have indeed been reluctant to consider it a workplace issue.

Increasingly businesses are realising there is a b link between what happens outside work and the workplace. In addition, about 1/5 of people experiencing domestic and family violence report the violence continues into the workplace. We know domestic and family violence has an impact on workplace health and safety and impact productivity.

Violence against women and their children costs Australian business is $1.9 billion per year. On the flipside, addressing gender inequality is good for business. Workplaces who do well on gender equality have been shown to have financial improvements. For example, organisations in the top quartile for gender diversity on executive teams are 25% more likely to financially outperform organisations in the bottom quartile.

And what is more workplaces are one of the social settings in which we spend a significant portion of our lives. Workplaces, therefore, can contribute to the prevention of domestic and family violence by raising awareness, challenging sexist attitudes and behaviour, role modelling respectful relationships, and providing a safe space from violence and being a source of social and economic support to people experiencing violence.

Workplaces can address domestic and family violence as part of their Diversity & Inclusion policies and strategies. They can hold leaders accountable for minimising or justifying sexism, violence or harassment, and take steps towards implementing safety plans.

The second myth we would like to bust is that there are not any perpetrators or victims at our workplace. It can be hard to recognise that our colleagues can be people who perpetrate domestic and family violence, particularly when they don't fit the image of the sort of monsters we imagined perpetrators to be.

However, there is no one type of perpetrator. There also is no one typical victim, DFV happens across communities and socio-economic groups and cultural backgrounds. The key driver of violence against women including domestic and family violence is gender inequality. We know cultural backgrounds, socio-economic status and/or sexuality or gender identity can reinforce stereotypes of gender inequality.

We also note there is no one type of perpetrator. Sometimes we think they are easy to spot, particularly if they appear abrasive or overbearing, but there is no one type of person who uses domestic and family violence, they come from different cultural and religious backgrounds, they have different sexualities, gender identities, socioeconomic statuses, postcodes, and various levels of education.

Perpetrators can be 'nice people' too. They can seem likeable to their colleagues and friends and can be good at their job and seem like everyone else so it is important we bust that myth. What the workplace can do is recognise, identify and raise awareness of all the signs and make sure as they record incidents that a ensure privacy.

The third deeply held myth is 'it is not that bad because he does not hit her'. Domestic and family violence includes physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and sexual abuse as well as violent, controlling or threatening behaviour or any other form of behaviour that causes a family member or intimate partner to be fearful. What can workplaces do?

They can play a role in speaking up against this, and for respectful relationships. Evidence shows violence against women is much more likely to occur when power opportunities and resources are not shared equally between men and women in society and women are not valued and respected as much men. Speaking out against rigid gender stereotypes, a driver of violence, is important. We need to challenge those rigid views about men's work or women's work or men being the head of the household or men being in charge of relationship because those are the kinds of ideas that can condone financial abuse, for example. We also know workplaces can set out key policies to address violence in all forms and some workplaces can provide support to the community through the nature of the work they contact or their retail presence, for example.

The next myth we would like to bust is this one, four – I don't want to get involved because it is none of my business. Domestic and family violence is something that occurs behind closed doors, so people can often feel reluctant intervening. But addressing domestic and family violence is everyone's business, affects safety and well-being in workplaces. Workplaces have an important role in equipping staff to be active bystanders and to challenge behaviours linked to domestic and family violence. Many people do not want to speak up when they hear or see disrespectful behaviour is because they don't feel equipped to do so. But equipping staff to be active bystanders is an important element of building a culture of respect and equality and stopping violence before it starts.

Training staff on how to be an active bystander is an important part of the prevention work that workplaces can take to address violence. Bystanders can disrupt some of the underlying conditions and precursors to violence such as disrespect and casual sexism. For example, research shows that going along with sexual jokes can create an environment tolerating problematic behaviour and, conversely, calling out that kind of behaviour can be very powerful in supporting individuals experiencing violence and creating a culture of respect.

What we know in summary is workplaces can give staff the skills to address sexist language and jokes. We also know workplace practices and policies can be addressed by organisations and we can question stereotyped ideas about masculinity and femininity in the workplace. The fifth myth around domestic and family violence that we often hear – that people believe, "we are not therapists or lawyers so there is nothing that we can do." But in reality, there is a significant amount workplaces can do. Where disclosures occur or the use of domestic and family violence is revealed, people in human resources, in management or even colleagues can often become first responders and while it is not their role to necessarily provide counselling or legal advice, they have a vital role in listening and hearing the stories of those experiencing or using domestic and family violence.

It is important for organisations to equip staff to respond safely and respectfully to disclosures or revelations of violence and to provide appropriate referrals to services. When individuals share experiences of violence it is an act of trust. The most important thing you can do is to listen to the person, show you believe them and to take the disclosure seriously. It is important to remember that instances of domestic and family violence will be different for every individual and the response may be different depending on the circumstances.

Be honest – if you don't have legal or counselling skills or training, but know you can provide referral information about where to get specialised support or assistance. So work places can listen to individuals to show they are believed and take disclosure seriously. They play an important role in establishing if there is an immediate risk to safety and to take action if there is an provide accurate information about where to get support or assistance.

The next myth bust is that domestic and family violence only happens to straight cis-gender women. Domestic and family violence can affect anyone . Of this, sex or gender, age, race, sexuality, disability, income or lifestyle and this includes men. Men can be victims of domestic and family violence but what we do know is men and boys' experience violence differs to women. They are likely to experience violence in relationships as a child or sibling rather than an intimate partner. Men are more likely to report an incident of physical assault that was perpetrated against them by a male stranger at a place of entertainment or outside location.

95% of all victims of violence, whether women or men, however, experience violence from a male perpetrator. LGBTIQ+ people, including cis and trans men, experience domestic and family violence, but it can look different. For example, it can be manifested by threats to out someone to their family, friends, community or workplace and LGBT people are also much less likely to find support services meeting their specific needs, such as support for female perpetrators, transgender or intersex services. Violence against diverse women is often experienced in combination with other forms of structural inequality and discrimination and so that increases the complexity of how we understand it and how we can respond to it as well.

So what can a workplace do? It can take an intersectional approach to developing responses to domestic and family violence. It can also ensure a diversity of people contribute to the development of any workplace response including the development of policies and education and develop a response that involves initiatives that will address the different experiences of different groups will stop that is really critical.

The final myth to bust before we move on… Before I go back to David and we move onto our panel conversation, is seven,, "If anyone at our organisation did that, we would just fire them." It is tempting to think if you become aware of a perpetrator that the workplace should dismiss them immediately. In fact, this can make things worse for the victim and addressing individual behaviour is not always successful. Organisations have a role in addressing the drivers of violence and encouraging perpetrators to seek help. Until we see systemic change, we will continue to see domestic and family violence happening broadly in our society and even playing out in the workplace.

So the workplace can play a role in maintaining a safe work environment for victims and survivors and staff who have witnessed violence. They can prioritise the safety of the victim or survivor, both within and outside the workplace, and can support initiatives to address the underlying drivers of violence against women.

The seven myths I have just hopefully busted for everyone on the call here, we go into significant detail in the resource we have produced with Our Watch and people are very welcome to go to our website to look at the resources available to organisations and individuals and to drill down more deeply for DCA members and organisations who access the resources at Our Watch to get a full report on these myth busters.

## DAVID MORRISON:

It is a quality piece of work that the DCA and Our Watch there have produced and as Lisa said is widely available and is certainly with anyone picking up and looking at and we will explore now with our panellists these issues and more around what we can all do to combat this great social scourge, particularly in our workplace.

So I would like to take the opportunity of introducing our panellists. Firstly Cara Gleeson is the director of practice leadership and has experience in the field of violence prevention, gender equality and women's right. Welcome. I would like to introduce Ryan Burke from Commonwealth Bank, head of inclusion and adversity. He has implemented the approach to inclusion and diversity for the last six years. I would like to introduce Doctor Virginia Mapedzahama. She is the principal consultant at Dune health and well-being and has research expertise in subjective experiences of sexuality and gendered violence and intersectionality. Until recently she was a senior research officer at ANROWS and the director of research at AWAI.

To Cara, Virginia, Ryan, welcome and thank you very much for joining Lisa and I for the panel discussion that follows Lisa's presentation. I will start with Lisa and ask why did DCA want to develop the resource for business?

## LISA ANNESE:

Thank you so much, David. It has gone dark. This is a workplace issue. We want to make a contribution to the elimination of violence against women and and we know there is an opportunity with workplaces to try and have a conversation and address some behaviours taking place but we also know workplaces employ people who are both victims and perpetrators and so they can play an important role in identifying the factors happening and identifying behaviours or identify the fat people need support doing something about it and they also have a role to play in addressing gender inequality. We know in Australia that he see a membership base has been really instrumental in supporting the movement towards gender equality by calling out sexism and by taking steps towards having more gender equal workplaces and that is an important part of the conversation.

## DAVID MORRISON:

Thanks. Cara, I know because I have been lucky enough to have spent four years on the board of Our Watch what your organisation does but for those who are not familiar with your organisation, it is one of the leading organisations preventing violence against women and children, so from your perspective, what from your perspective has helped address the drivers of violence?

## CARA GLEESON:

Thanks to all of you. Workplaces are important places for us to look at how we can address violence against women because rightly or only, Australians are workaholics. It has been that case for some time and continuing in COBIT and is COVID and post COVID, babies have exposure in utero over their partners or parents, so even before a baby is born, it has been influenced by the workplace so it is a very influential institution within our culture. And Our Watch is the unique organisation set up by Australian governments.

They are our members and we were set up maybe seven or eight years ago now and set up to lead preventing violence against women in Australia to draw on the excellent work taking place at the community level across the country. Our focus is on primary solely and I will drop enabling to the framework in Australia run primary called Change The Story. While colleagues in the sector might work with victims, survivors or people at risk of perpetrating or experiencing violence, our role is different. We work with the general population but often in settings and institutions and we look at what cultural and structural change we can influence to stop the violence before it starts, to create a new future where that violence does not take place.

Research including the link I have just dropped in, tells us to address violence against women we need to look at gender inequality and in particular different types and manifestations of it, Lisa mentioned rigid stereotypes. I don't think I have to tell anyone in this virtual room that workplaces are highly gendered environments.

Unfortunately gender inequality is evident in very visible ways. We can have a look at leadership in companies, in various institutions, we can look at the gender pay gap, or heavily female and male dominated industries. It is also unconscious bias, women in leadership or any part of a workplace who are often damned if they do and damned if they don't.

We can look at how we can promote gender equality. Preventing violence against women and primary prevention is not about changing just the individuals, it's about changing society and the culture in which individuals develop their attitudes and learn about acceptable behaviour.

We do not exist in a vacuum, we are influenced by structures, systems and norms and workplaces as a key institution in Australian culture and across the world are a great place we can work with tweaking those visible instances of gender inequality. But also looking at the more invisible and hard-to-influence things like unconscious bias. Thanks, David.

## DAVID MORRISON:

Thanks, I will add my voice to the fact that the Our Watch were called Change the Story is around breaking and a world-class piece of work. I would encourage anyone to avail themselves of it and look at the work done in this area.

Virginia, turning to you, can you tell us why it is critical that workplaces look at this issue through an intersectional lens?

## DR VIRGINIA MAPEDZAHAMA:

Thanks, David, I want to start by congratulating Lisa and the TEAM DCA and the team at Our Watch for producing such an important resource, I am calling in from the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation.

It's important to look at these issues through an intersectional lens rather than looking at it around gender alone or class or race alone, they are incapable of addressing the complexity of experience for women who face multiple categories of discrimination and oppression.

Intersectionality calls attention to the fact that we cannot view domestic and family violence as an issue of gender only or race only or class and religion only. We must recognise that experiences of domestic and family violence are very much related to or compounded by all other categories of oppression that some women experience simultaneously.

For workplaces, and intersectional approach allows for a more holistic understanding of an individual and their position in societal structures and hierarchies of power and oppression. It facilitates those nuanced understandings of complexities of experience of domestic and family violence.

The way I look at it, women and girls' experiences of domestic and family violence is not just based on their gender. For me, gender is a driver of domestic and family violence but not the only driver. There are other categories of oppression that matter and sometimes matter a lot more, and workplaces need to employ approaches that not only acknowledge that these categories of discrimination exist, but that some groups of women experiencing those categories simultaneously, compounding their experience of domestic and family violence.

I will give you an example very quickly. Think of a migrant woman who speaks limited English in an English-speaking country such as ours. They may have additional oppressive experiences or traumas unique to that population of migrants and that compounds that traumas they experience as a victim survivor of domestic and family violence.

They may face greater barriers to getting care or they may be less likely to report the abuse to authorities because of limited English language proficiency or because of fears regarding their migration status. There is some research that ANROWS produced last year and a few years before, pointing to this information.

Let me also quickly add that an intersectional lens enables workplaces to recognise and address how violence differs between groups of women. Let me put these differences into context as an example. We know if that some groups of women from LGBT+ communities like Lisa mentioned and especially trans women, they experience domestic and family violence at much higher rates than other groups of women and cisgender women.

Research is telling us that 44% of lesbian women experience intimate partner violence compared to 35% of heterosexual women. And we also know that women and girls with disabilities are 2-4 times more likely to experience domestic violence than women without disabilities and not only that, they are less likely to report violence against them and less likely to access services. Because often services are not adequately designed to cater to diverse abilities.

Whether barriers to accessibility or a lack of a ramp or something like that.

## DAVID MORRISON:

Thank you, Virginia, you covered a wealth of detail in a short space of time. It points to the complexity of the subjects we are talking about, but it also raises some very significant issues for employers and those who lead in workplaces, to tailor their responses to their workforce.

One size does not fit all, as Lisa covered in her presentation. It is incredibly important that intersectionality lens is applied and as employers, we are nuanced in how we build a safer environment for those who form part of our workforce. Cara Gleeson, I know Our Watch has done work around intersectionality and how we can frame adequate and suitable responses as employers, can you share some insights into that?

## CARA GLEESON:

Thank you, Virginia, for covering so much in your answer. I want to acknowledge that I will attempt to talk about intersectionality to a CSW audience, I have had some of my biggest aha moments and biggest feminist learnings at parallel events at CSW. I want to recognise that and thank everyone for their contributions.

At Our Watch we are committed to ending violence against all women. And we know that not all women experience the same inequality and discrimination and the same rates of violence. Virginia mentioned statistics on the experiences of Women With Disabilities and trans and lesbian women.

We also note in Australia First Nations women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are three times more likely to experience violence, in Australian Bureau of Statistics personal safety survey, than nonindigenous women in the last 12 months.

It is something we need to consider. I will start by talking about how we have looked at this particularly around violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. I will drop a link in again, I will send it to the attendees, this time.

This link is to a resource called Changing the Picture, we developed at Our Watch working closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, organisations, researchers and academics. It looks at what is driving the very high rates of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Australia.

I want to be really clear, this violence is not perpetrated necessarily by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. It is perpetrated by nonindigenous men and if I can successfully send this image, I will hopefully be able to share with you... I can't do that, that's OK... You will find a graphic on that resource about what drives the rates of violence.

There is an intersection of three different key points that create a perfect storm. There are the gender factors, the gender drivers we have spoken about, the gender inequality that exists in Australia. There is also the ongoing impacts of colonisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their families and communities. And the third piece is the ongoing impacts of colonisation for nonindigenous people in society.

When those three things interact in a perfect storm at a structural and social level, we see the increased rates of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. I encourage you to have a look at this resource. For me, it was something I have learned a lot from in our practice at Our Watch and how we can bring that to life.

When we are thinking about a workplace, workplaces are places where structures of inequality other than gender manifest. I remember hearing about work late in Victoria with the aged care sector and looking at gender equality and promoting gender equality in the aged care sector, and a colleague was talking about, it might look like a female dominated workforce, you enter the workforce thinking about that – underpaid, undervalued, under-appreciated, but when you look at the demographics of the workplace you could see there were clear delineation is, this speaks to Kimberle Crenshaw's first articulation the number of years ago.

Most of the personal care workers were either recently migrated first generation migrant women. The next level of middle management, loads of women in middle management. You have a look at the backgrounds of those women and they would be second or third generation migrant or Anglo Australians in that area.

And the senior leadership in the aged care sector, it is all men. A perfect example of how different manifestations of any quality are coming about in the workplace and how that must be considered if you are trying to improve one type of equality or representation, you must represent and analyse and see and listen and learn from how it is intersecting with other areas as well.

I will leave it at that at this point, thank you.

## DAVID MORRISON:

Thank you for your acknowledgement and insights, from the start, I can tell you as a mid 60 year old Anglo-Saxon male with a 40-year military career, the change in attitudes I've held around gender equality and domestic violence and family violence has been the most important journey of my life in the last 10 years and I have been privileged to be surrounded by extraordinary people, especially women, who have given me their time and support. Ryan, I will turn to you. This resource highlights examples that the Commonwealth Bank of Australia has done addressing domestic and family violence.

## RYAN BURKE:

Congratulations on an awesome resource and on why it is a workplace issue and why a response is needed. We are the largest bank and we put the work into ensuring that we are approving the well-being of all Australians including those individuals in the most vulnerable circumstances. With our scale we know it is an uncomfortable truth there are many people in our organisations that are likely to be experiencing domestic and family violence either as a victim, perpetrator or someone supporting someone within the family or within their workplace.

So with that context, we started our work in 2015 and really leveraged the amazing relationships we have with some community partners like Our Watch and Diversity Council Australia to really help shape what our approach would be. We needed to learn from the experts and to get that subject matter expertise about where we should start. And where we did start was by looking inward. So, we needed to look at our own practices, our own policies and understand what the current state was and what we needed to do to put in the right foundations to readily support our people before we started communicating more broadly across Commonwealth Bank but also within our customers.

One of the first things we did with support of community organisations and partners was to articulate what the boundary is for our workplace, so we can't be everything to everyone. It is not our role to provide therapeutic response, so we spent a lot of time around articulating what is our role within this space and for us it was around really ensuring our people have the right referral pathways and if they should disclose, we could respond in the most appropriate and empathetic way.

From that we also wanted to make sure our people stay, we really want to keep them employed, so if people experience this at home, how can we support them to maintain their employment so they would have a means to leave the violent situation if they choose to? That is a critical thing around our people and just generally victim survivors wanting to leave that relationship.

We have done many things over that time and some have been more fundamental and others have been more, I guess, transformational. So we looked at how can we strengthen our policies, particularly around leave, so we provide unlimited leave for our people experiencing violence or domestic and family violence as a victim. It is about putting in place triage processes, so if someone discloses, we have the referral pathways there. We also engage with the EAP provider and make sure they have the right skills if they should be contacted.

We looked at leaders and team members and supported them with training on what is this issue, and what does it mean for the workplace? This would have been fabulous to leverage on how to respond in the right way and what not to say and what to say to make sure we are supporting our people as best we can. So from that base, that definitely did not happen over night, we spent quite a bit of time doing that over a few years and we started to extend our focus to customers and within the community and all of that work has culminated in a strategy we have called Next Chapter and the team will share information about that in the link in the chat.

The Next Chapter is about how we can provide services towards research about financial abuse in the context of domestic and family violence. As a financial services institution we note that the role we can play is a addressing financial abuse and that is where we do play and so what we have done is started a financial independence resource where we collaborated with Good Shepherd, Providing a Range of Support, including financial coaching and pathways to support people impacted by domestic and family violence to rebuild their lives after leaving a violent situation.

We also have a community well, team in CBA, supporting customers experiencing vulnerability and then can do a range of things to support customers in terms of direct banking, and really helping them in those moments that. And then, more broadly in terms of our community work, we are in the process of building a range of research with University of New South Wales, gender violence research network to better understand what is financial abuse as there is not a lot of information out there particularly within the Australian context, so there is work to be done to understand what is this issue? We have worked on this for some time and are proud of the work and it would not have come about without the amazing support and advice and guidance from our community partners as they are the ones with the knowledge and they have supported us every step of the way.

## DAVID MORRISON:

You make such great points there about the need to find organisations like the DCA or Our Watch or Health and Wellbeing who have the subject matter expertise because otherwise what can happen so easily is employers and leaders within workplace response can be… It can be for the best intentions but really has little impact or indeed sometimes detrimental impact.

Lisa, it can be difficult for people to know what to do if someone makes a disclosure to them about domestic and family violence. What advice would you give to workplaces around that?

LISA ANNESE:  
Thanks, David. And can I commend the work Commonwealth Bank have done in this space as far as being a proactive employer taking steps to improve the capability of the individuals within the organisation to both support people experiencing domestic and family violence but also to proactively address some causes. Especially with respect to gender inequality. I think it is a standout case study and I think that…

I would suggest to employers they follow the lead of this organisation, of the Commonwealth Bank. I think even the most well-intentioned individuals, if you don't understand how to respond to someone and have the confidence to do that, you might be inclined to make no response at all and what we know is someone's experience of the first disclosure might affect future disclosures and opportunities for them to receive appropriate support and assistance.

Workplaces can spend time supporting individuals, understanding the complexity of the issue, understanding why it matters in the workplace and then making sure individuals are equipped with accurate information and with the right skills to have those conversations, including trying to listen to someone openly without judgement, creating a safe environment so you reassure them you believe what they are saying, you do not condone the violence, without condoning the perpetrator of the violence but then you have information then to support them and refer them to accurate services that can assist them.

Then I think that if that is done continually and people feel they are supported in being able to do that and have the confidence to do that, that can be really significant in making a difference to any individual who has a disclosure.

## DAVID MORRISON:

Yeah. Thanks, Lisa. Ryan, I might go back to you, someone working in this area in such a large organisation. I know from my own leadership experience it can be very difficult when you become aware of instances of domestic and family violence. What does CB a do to address the issue of employees who use domestic and family violence?

## RYAN BURKE:

I guess for us it was really a matter run maturity around this topic, so as we started to learn more about the experience of our people who experience domestic and family violence as victim survivors and we were more comfortable with our response and approach and all the foundational work we put in place, we extended that work to focus on employees use domestic and family violence. This is a complex matter.

It is very grey, and at the time there was not a lot of publicly available information about what workplaces should do to address employees who use domestic and family violence, so we had to find out, so in 2018 we pulled together a workshop with business, government and also community organisations to help us better understand the issue and to map out what a workplace response could be.

It was a fascinating experience. We learnt a lot about the topic but we also learned about what we didn't know and that is with the gold is so we could find out what that gap analysis was. Since then over about two years worth of work, we were able to collaborate with the Champions Of Change in Australia to develop an approach to addressing employees who use domestic and family violence and that guide is really thorough, covers a range of things, particularly within the Australian context.

At Commonwealth Bank our approach internally, we have taken a focus that it is the safety of the victim survivor that is paramount in any of these situations and that is also noted within the resources being launched today.

We also want to make sure our people are safe, to make sure that anybody involved with these situations, they safety is a priority for us. We take a rehabilitative approach, so we want to hold… And if a person who has been alleged all used violence in terms of domestic and family violence, to hold an account to change the behaviour so we encourage them to access the right supports, refer them outside of CBA and manage the situation on a case-by-case basis. These situations are very complex. It is not something which is a one size fits all.

Also having a principle-based approach has been useful to get the right mindset and having that safety mindset of our people front of mine. Envelope in that we did a lot of training with some community partners and what this issue is as there are a lot of stereotypes as this resource outlines and so we wanted to break that down internally and have a position around what is our approach and every organisation will have a different approach.

What I can say is these situations are complex and also confronting and so anybody who is in a workplace who is responding or supporting employees, one of the biggest learnings is to have that self-care and to have a trauma informed approach to what you are doing and to leverage the Employee Assistance Programmes out there because these situations are grey and confronting and to keep or sustain focus in this space and we need to make sure we care for ourselves as well.

## DAVID MORRISON:

Thanks. I know, again, from having run a large organisation, how you respond when you become aware there is a perpetrator within the workforce, it is not just a simplistic approach, it is not again one size fits all, there are differences that come into play. Cara, I know Our Watch has done an increasing amount of work around what workplaces can do to address this issue around how you manage someone who has been identified as being a perpetrator of domestic and family violence.

Do you want to talk about the work what has been done?

## CARA GLEESON:

I want to acknowledge the work of Ryan and No to Violence they have led work alongside Male Champions of Change on this. I am putting on a link to a resource launch last year. Our Watch has done work in this area but we have learned a lesson from the leaders in this area.

Working with perpetrators is not our expertise. It is something that is very important and connected to our primary prevention work because we know when you talk about gender equality and violence against women, there will be an increase in exposures. Whether in a workplace, a sporting club, a university or school, it happens.

It is an important part of primary prevention to ensure you are doing it safely and usually that will mean having to do some ground work on ensuring that your response as a workplace to people who are either experiencing and disclose, or perhaps perpetrating, needs to be well-established before you jump into what might be the easier to market or sell parts of promoting gender equality and being part of the solution.

It is important work that needs to be done there. I think I will reiterate what others have said, it is really understandable that your first instinct would be to get rid of the person, do what is in your control, fire the person. There are good reasons why you shouldn't do that. Or as a first step. Centring your response around the victim survivor is critical.

And in doing that you must ask how firing this person makes the victim survivor safer? We know perpetrators are most at risk of behaviour perpetrating when a victim tries to leave, when the victim is pregnant or when the victim discloses.

Loss of employment can escalate the risk of further violence and may or may not contribute to the extent of the violence. Workplaces need to consider whether an employee who has perpetrated violence is of risk of causing harm immediately to the victim survivor, to themselves or other employees. Many things need to be considered here.

I think the key question is going back to what will firing achieve for the victim survivor? You may not even know the victim survivor, they may not be part of your workforce but that is an important thing to ask, is specially thinking at the micro level.

At a macro level we as leaders in a workplace, everyone at a workplace is part of the community and we have a responsibility to prevent and response to violence against women within our roles and responsibilities and expertise. Is firing someone just moving on the problem? We might not all be in a workplace like CBA with a complex and principled approach. Are there other things you could be doing? Is it normalising violence against women and normalising support services like the men's referral line in the way you support your workers in a general way, something you can do that will create a good pathway if the perpetrator comes to your knowledge.

I would suggest workplaces should develop clear policies, procedures and codes of conduct and that all employees are aware of this. So it is not after-the-fact, it is something that is known. So when an act occurs inside or outside the workplace there is a well-established resource and process.

Workplaces need to assess each incident according to its unique characteristics and consult a referral process like men's helpline. Ryan has been saying how critical his community partners have been in setting this up.

Workplaces need to respect the rights of the perpetrators to a fair process and employment and they have a range of legal obligations that must be considered. There are some key points but it goes back to centring the victim survivor in your response and looking at that.

## DAVID MORRISON:

It is such a complex area and your advice is terrific. Virginia, though, the resource we are considering today points out that certain groups experience violence at increased rates due to overlapping forms of marginalisation and discrimination. It often talks about vulnerability but can you talk about research that has been done in this area?

## DR VIRGINIA MAPEDZAHAMA:

Thanks, David. I like that question, it's a very good point. I want to start by talking about this thing, vulnerability. I think the thing with the language of the discourse of vulnerability, it is deficit-focused. It focuses on the deficit. What I mean is, I guess my problem with that discourse is how the survivor victim is imagined in those discourses.

When you look at it they are infantilised or in a position like needing our help, which for me is a disempowering way of looking at the experiences. For me the discourse of vulnerability moves away from looking at the historical roots of oppression that rendered some groups of women more likely to experience violence.

And at the same time it actually does not make clear or even recognise that if people are experiencing vulnerability, that vulnerability is often produced by institutions or social processes or structures of power. It doesn't tell us how the vulnerability is produced or by whom. We know no group of people is inherently vulnerable. There is something fundamental that we should question by using this language, without being really critical about what we are really saying.

This is where shifting discourses or frameworks is crucial and where critical approaches like intersectionality that we have talked about come in and why they are so important. Admittedly, in Australia research that critically applies an intersectional lens to understanding domestic and family violence is still emerging. It is growing but it is still emerging.

However, this work still very much reaffirms what your report points out, certain groups of women experience domestic and family violence at increased rates because they experience multiple categories of discrimination or oppression at the same time.

For example, like I mentioned at the beginning, the Women with disabilities are 2-4 times more likely to experience violence and trans women experience violence at higher levels than other groups of women. On the last point of trans women, let me mention a few findings from a report that was published by ANROWS in 2020.

That report documents the experience of trans women of colour. What that report showed, it is available on the ANROWS website.

## DAVID MORRISON:

For our overseas guests, do you want to just explain ANROWS?

## DR VIRGINIA MAPEDZAHAMA:

It is Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. An organisation that was established alongside Our Watch. They are a research organisation tasked with creating an evidence-base on violence against women in Australia, they have a good resource of research that they are commissioned by academics and organisations that deal with domestic and family violence, to do on their behalf and they put it together.

Their website, www.anrows.org.au, it brings up research they have produced over the years. The report I want to focus on that demonstrates why a focus on vulnerability is less effective as an intersectional approach because that report did very well in how it brought intersectionality into the way they analysed the experiences of trans women of colour.

That report showed that trans women of colour are subjected to sexual violence, sorry, they are more likely to be subjected to sexual violence, in fact twice as likely as other woman to report being sexually assaulted 10 or more times. That is a very high number. This research tells us sexual violence is a common experience for trans women of colour.

Their sexual violence includes sexual harassment and sexual assault, both in public and private domains. That's why the rates are so high. It showed that trans women of colour were more likely to report having been assaulted by a stranger and more likely to report being assaulted both outside and in the home compared to other women.

And that report, more worryingly, showed that trans women of colour are more likely to have their complaints dismissed. And not only that, that they are more likely to be socially ostracised for making a complaint. And when you actually look at it, they are often overlooked in national statistics or research on sexual violence against women. They are like an invisible group that actually experiences violence at much higher rates.

Another study I want to touch on very quickly, I know time is of the essence, ANROWS published in 2016 but it is very important in showing the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse women in Australia. That research investigated the experiences of violence by migrant and refugee women, overall while migrant and refugee women do report similar forms of family violence as women from nonimmigrant backgrounds, there are some differences in the types of violence that migrant and refugee women experience as well as the structural context in which the violence takes place.

Cara mentioned something in relation to the importance of taking structures or structural contacts into account. The research found the constraints produced by immigration policies are still really important, and of concern, especially in cases where the women depend on perpetrators for economic security and residency rights.

They might not report violence because of fear of having their visa cancelled or the perpetrator can report them to have their visa cancelled. We know from this research that immigrant and refugee women are motivated by social safety provided by their communities as opposed to physical safety. For me, what was important in this research when talking about intersectionality, is assumptions about when we don't use an intersectional lens, what safety means but the notion of social safety provided by community gets lost.

When you talk to refugee and immigrant women, the social safety provided by their communities, particularly in the absence of broader communities in their country of origin, becomes very important. That leads to a lot of the women resolving family violence without ending relationships or breaking up families or leaving an abusive relationship.

And to really understand those reasons behind why immigrant or refugee women might stay, it is not just fear of having no money, it is actually about social safety for them. I think if you look at the issues here, it is actually not about deficit, the discourse on vulnerability, neither does the issue in any shape or form with the victim survivors, the drivers of the violence are rooted in historical processes of oppression like colonialism, patriarchy and so on and an intersectional approach allows us to get to the roots of those processes, rather than just looking at the victims as vulnerable.

## DAVID MORRISON:

Fantastic points. A great thing happening in this panel discussion is a number of references have been made to source documents from your organisations, from ANROWS, Our Watch, from DCA and they are available for participants in the chat function of this Zoom call. It goes back to the point of this is very nuanced, is not one size fits all, it's not just I will hold everyone to account and we will move on with our lives, it has to be attended response to meet the needs of the people suffering from domestic and family violence.

Lisa, why are some workplaces reluctant to have policies around family and domestic violence?

## LISA ANNESE:

I think they have bought into the myth that this is a private issue and so therefore they don't have a role to play. Hopefully we have been able to bust that myth in this conversation, that actually there is a significant role the workplace can play and indeed some violence continues into the workplace. And of course, given that two out of three women who experience violence are employed, it very much is a workplace issue.

But the other thing I think is at play is a lot of workplaces think, especially in Australia where we have pretty good leave entitlements for individuals, I think organisations feel as though the current provisions and how legislative instruments provide enough capacity for people to manage their personal situations, especially if they need to take leave to attend court or for other health-related issues around violence.

There has been a reluctance to do anything in addition to that. I am pleased to see now a lot of leading practised employees are challenging that an implementing domestic and family violence policies, specifically leave around violence and investing in building the capability of managers and supervisors but it is the tip of the iceberg. We need this to become more standard business practice for workplaces across the country to start engaging in that.

## DAVID MORRISON:

I couldn't agree with you more and, Ryan, as someone very involved in the workplace, I know you have an alarm going off in the background and we will see how we go, but what would you say to businesses who are listening today? Where do they start?

## RYAN BURKE:

Sure. Thanks. The fire alarm may go off. Please bear with me. We are on the path of learning from community organisations and looking at our role in this. We have covered a lot of those things in this really complex matter. We have worked on the strategy for many years which is part of our diversity inclusion approach and I would suggest organisations really engage with organisations around them that have this expertise, that can help you build the strategies that can review your policies, processes, provide the training and really support you from start to finish, so engage in their services.

It is also great learning experience for both parties from what I have experienced from my engagements with lots of community organisations.

I will go on mute for a second.

## DAVID MORRISON:

Your safety is important for us as well, so you need to follow all instructions here.

## RYAN BURKE:

False alarm. Workplaces should define what is your role, what is the path you can play? As I mentioned, we are a financial services institution and financial abuse in the context of violence is where we can make the most impact. We can use the amazing data we have, technology platforms, the reach of our branch network across the country and our locations around the world. So for us it was around that is our space, where we can have impact because we cannot be everything to everyone. And also the boundary of our response, so we're not here to provide counselling, not experts in that, so knowing where the line is not to extend beyond that line in supporting people and to make sure we have the referral pathways out. So they are probably the key pieces I would suggest an organisation start with, engage externally, learn from the experts and then work out what is your role within this, what part you can play within this very complex issue.

## DAVID MORRISON:

Thank you very much for that. Cara, I was lucky to be working with Our Watch, there was enormous amount of work done to try to understand some foundational issues of what causes domestic and family violence and of course gender inequality is seen as one of the paramount issues that we as all societies have to face, so what to you and to Our Watch, what does gender equality look like in the workplace?

## CARA GLEESON:

Thanks. Unfortunately there is not a workplace that has got it completely yet, so not a preprepared point here is what it looks like, so we have to dive into research but also a bit of our imagination is necessary and a growing and large evidence base of what workplaces can do to promote gender equality and in turn prevent violence against women.

One last link from me in the chat is Our Watch's site, so I recommend looking at DCA and DCA membership. You will find tools and resources are there. But Our Watch, for about five years, as a leading project, it was around what we can do to support workplaces to be able to take the journey promoting gender equality. We specifically have not gone down the path of an accreditation program. What we have are freely available tools and resources.

Here in Australia, they situate well within your gender equality legislation requirements and reporting and if you're lucky enough to be in Victoria, they situate well with the new gender equality legislation and your reporting requirements there as well. If you have done previous work in White Ribbon area or around promoting and raising awareness around family violence and domestic violence, that were considered well within the workplace equality and respect standards.

The practical – what can you do? What we have told workplaces for the last couple of years is really about situating your work around five standards. The standards are around… Four Cs and one S. Commitment, conditions, culture, support and core business. I know we are short of time so I will quickly go through what they mean. The first standard is commitment. You want to be committed to preventing violence against women, proud and able to say you are committed and have structures, strategies and policies that explicitly promote gender equality.

Then you report on them. You say if you are progressing or not. The next is conditions and it is about including gender equality in your conditions, in your treatment, remuneration and promotion processes and this is getting at the heart of the gender equality pay gap or gender pay gap that we know and also around the experiences of your employees. An example is ensuring flexible work and access to parental leave, enterprise agreements and policies and these are not just there but supported, they are modelled and promoted by leaders and embedded in the culture and promoted to both male and female staff as well.

Then we have culture, is that hard… Not super tangible things that your staff will say. I think the social safety Virginia spoke about is important and what might make one staff person feel safe might not make every staff member feel safe. If someone says sexist, the sexist joke happens in the kitchen at the office, people know what to do, they feel confident and comfortable to say, "That is not what we are about here," and there is a clear process you can report any behaviour or anything anyone has said.

The next is support, and that goes back to what I said – when you do primary work, you often will have increased disclosures because people will start to be… Be more comfortable to talk about the experiences, so you have responsibilities to ensure you have structures and practices and cultures and processes supporting those staff and create an appropriate response to staff experiencing violence, bullying or sexual harassment.

The last standard is the core business and it's about the work you do and how that promotes and aligns with your commitment to gender equality and the prevention of violence. Ryan spoke often about being a financial institution and that is their core business, so they looked at what they can do to promote gender equality within that role but also what they can do to respond and support customers and clients experiencing violence.

I think that is a good example of how you need to bring this true to yourself and with your workplace and should your core business. It cannot just be an inwardly facing piece of work for colleagues, it must be external focusing to your community and you can provide influence and reach out as well.

I will leave it with that. You will see tools and resources including self-assessment and audits on the website I put in there and ways to get in contact with Our Watch as well. Thanks.

## DAVID MORRISON:

Thanks. I am conscious of time. We are hosted by CSW65 and as we get to the half-hour, only two minutes away, the call will finish and I want to wrap up by thanking everyone, but Virginia, I note you were going to be asked a question about stereotypes, a huge issue and not that anyone could be asked to do it justice so quickly but if you would like to take a very brief opportunity to touch on that, we will take that as the final question and then we will close with a minute to spare, let me thank everybody and we can move on with our day.

## DR VIRGINIA MAPEDZAHAMA:

Thanks. I will be brief and I think a lot of stuff I was going to talk about has been touched on by Lisa or Cara anyway and so it is really just more direct approaches that help employees and we have heard about that and approaches acknowledging and raising awareness about domestic and family violence in the workplace. So one thing that is really important to counter stereotypes is making sure there is an abundance of information about domestic and family violence, but is very much a systemic problem and that has devastating impacts. So, that is enabling that workplaces can do but one thing workplaces can do is ensure staff have actually access, have done domestic abuse awareness training, another thing to do or maybe importantly or at the very least that staff with management responsibilities have this kind of training so that they are equipped with the capability to identify domestic abuse and how to support staff experiencing domestic abuse.

## DAVID MORRISON:

I will have to stop, Virginia. We have about 30 seconds left and I really have to thank everybody for participating. What a brilliant way to bring our panel discussion to an end and the fact we have got resources out there that we can go and find as employers and leaders, so I would like to thank everybody and thank the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, to the speakers, Ryan Burke, Cara Gleeson, Virginia Mapedzahama, and of course, Donna Ingram for her warm welcome too. Thank you very much to Our Watch, thank you all for joining our discussion. We wish you all the best in tackling what is one of the great social issues of our lifetime. All the best to everybody who has joined us today.

Thank you, and well done.

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