



**MEDIA RELEASE – MON 6TH SEPT 2010 – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Ombudsman finds domestic violence campaign ‘misleading’: men’s groups call for changes**

On the first anniversary of the launch of the South Australian government’s *Don’t Cross the Line* campaign, the Ombudsman [has found](#) the Office for Women guilty of unreasonable and wrong administrative action after failing to correct false and/or misleading information on the campaign website.

The Ombudsman asked the Australian Institute of Criminology to investigate the errors after a complaint by Men’s Health Australia showed that statistics on the website misled the public about the nature of violence in young people’s relationships.

Men’s Health Australia spokesman, Greg Andresen said “The [research evidence](#) shows that, as far as young people are concerned, the experiences of males and females with regard to relationship violence are quite similar.”

“Around a quarter of young people have seen either mum hitting dad or dad hitting mum, and it’s more likely they’ve seen their parents hitting each other than seeing one-way violence from either parent. Young males and females are also equally likely to say ‘yes’ to the statement ‘I’ve experienced domestic violence’.”

“As far as the attitudes of young people go, the research does show that some young people hold unacceptable attitudes to violence against women. For example, 8% of young people agreed with the statement ‘it’s okay for a boy to make a girl have sex, if she’s flirted with him, or led him on’ and 11% agreed with the statement ‘if a guy hits a girl he loves because he is jealous, it shows how much he feels for her.’

“However, many more hold unacceptable attitudes to violence against men. For example,

- Young people are more likely to say a woman ‘is right to’, or ‘has good reason to’, respond to relationship conflict by hitting (68%), than a man in the same situation (49%)
- While males hitting females was seen, by virtually all young people surveyed, to be unacceptable, it appeared to be quite acceptable for a girl to hit a boy (25% of young people agreed with the statement ‘when a girl hits a guy, it’s really not a big deal.’)
- Female to male violence was not only viewed light-heartedly, it was also seen as (virtually) acceptable.”

Instead of presenting such data on the *Don’t Cross the Line* website, the Office for Women instead presented erroneous statistics such as “95% of domestic violence involves a male perpetrator and a female victim” (the data shows that overall, at least [one in three](#) victims are male). While some of these errors have now been corrected, the website still contains a [page of inappropriate statistics](#) about violence against women only.

In an interview on ABC Radio on September 2nd, Minister for Women Gail Gago claimed that the campaign “is not a contest about who is the biggest victim.” Men’s Health Australia is hopeful this means that the campaign will be altered to present a balanced picture of relationship violence.

Mr Andresen said, “Unfortunately this is not an isolated incident. The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research [recently found](#) that the NSW Government had published eight ‘statistics’ in need of correction in their Domestic and Family Violence Discussion Paper. There appears to be a widespread culture within women’s departments that downplays or denies the existence of male victims of relationship violence and abuse.”

A coalition of thirty men’s health organisations and individuals [has written](#) to the Premier asking that the *Don’t Cross the Line* campaign and future respectful relationships and family violence campaigns be moved from the Office for Women to a more suitable government department.

Toni McLean, a counsellor for men and women who use violence said, “The consequences of the government’s one-sided view of relationship violence are devastating for young male victims who don’t speak up because they think their circumstances are unusual. Equally, the vast majority of boys who are non-violent could grow up with the distorted and unhealthy view that many of their peers are abusive to females.”

Micheal Woods, adjunct fellow at the University of Western Sydney, said “The Government has a public duty to present facts honestly and with integrity when releasing information in the public domain, especially about such an important area as relationship violence. We fear that the Office for Women may be ill-equipped to continue a role in designing and implementing respectful relationship and domestic violence policy because of their demonstrated bias.”

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