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For immediate release

Our attitudes about women - and men - need to change

VicHealth has released the 2013 National Community Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women Survey results. It is the third survey, the others being in 1995 and 2009. The results, though not significantly different to from 2009, highlight the need for concerted efforts to build attitudes that will help to put an end to the epidemic of violence against women.

In Australia one in three women have experience physical violence since the age of 15 and one in five women have experienced sexual violence. Police data in the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne has shown growing reports of violence against women over recent years and there is no sign of this slowing.

“Violence against women is a major crisis facing Australia – and the East is no exception” says Kristine Olaris, CEO of Women’s Health East. “Community attitudes contribute to violence against women because they influence what is considered acceptable behaviour. Attitudes that excuse or trivialise violence allow it to continue” she says.

The results of the survey show that Australians have a good knowledge of violence against women with increasing numbers of people recognising non physical forms of violence. There is also very little explicit support for violence against women. There are however some concerning results when it comes to attitudes to do with equality between men and women. For example 27% of people think men make better politicians and 19% who think that men should be the head of the household.

The work of VicHealth over recent years has shown that a lack of equality between men and women in our society is the major cause of violence toward women. The survey lends further support to this. It finds that those who are highly supportive of equitable gender roles in society and in relationships, are less likely to hold attitudes that are supportive of violence against women. “Violence against women is a crime that is about power and control. Attitudes and social structures that support men having more power than women in personal relationships and in our society need to change.” she says.

Megan, a survivor of sexual assault, is keen to see attitudes change. “Every time we allow a sexist or derogatory comment or joke to go by unquestioned, we are supporting a culture that degrades and disrespects women, and it is this culture which leads to such horrendous violence. We need to challenge these attitudes in everyday life in order to make real change” she says.

The survey results will provide much food for thought across Melbourne’s East where Women’s Health East, local governments, community health services, family violence and sexual assault services, Victoria Police and a range of other community organisations are working together to *prevent* violence against women. The [Together For Equality & Respect Action Plan 2013 – 2017](#) has just been released which highlights some of the work already going on in the region. It is planned that over time more and more actions will be added to this plan.

If you or someone you know is experiencing violence, help is available - contact the Eastern Domestic Violence Services (EDVOS) on 9259 4200 or the Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault on 9870 7310. In emergency situations or immediate danger contact Police on 000.

Some positive survey findings include:

- Most Australians have a good knowledge of violence against women and do not endorse attitudes which are supportive of this violence.
- There has been an increase in people understanding that violence can be in many forms not just physical violence eg verbal, social and emotional abuse. For example 79% of people agree that verbal abuse is serious compared to 70% previously.
- Most people recognise that partner violence is usually perpetrated by men.
- Most people also say they would intervene if these witnessed violence (98% if they know the victim, 92% if the victim is a stranger).

The survey also highlights that we have a long way to go in educating the public about this issue. Some of the more concerning results include:

- 21% of people still believe that violence can be excused if the violent person regrets it – this result is however improved on 2009 when the figure was 25%
- 43% of people think that rape results from men not being able to control their need for sex
- 53% of people believe that women going through custody battles often make up or exaggerate claims of domestic violence in order to improve their case.
- Only 64% of people understand that women are more likely to be raped by someone they know than a stranger – this figure has worsened since 1995 when the result was 76%
- More than half of Australian think that “women could leave a violent relationship if they really wanted to”
- Only 41% of people understand that women with disabilities experience much higher rates of violence

- Ends -

Media enquiries:

For further information or to organise an interview with survivor advocate Megan, please contact –

Kate Gibson, Health Promotion and Communications Officer, 9851 3700 kateg@whe.org.au

Kristine Olaris, Chief Executive Officer, 9851 3715 or kolaris@whe.org.au

Links and further information:

- *The full report on the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Women Survey can be found here <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/Freedom-from-violence/2013-National-Community-Attitudes-towards-Violence-Against-Women-Survey.aspx>*
- *Together for Equality & Respect: A Strategy to Prevent Violence against Women in Melbourne's East 2013-2017 can be downloaded from <http://www.whe.org.au/newsite/index.html>*
- *Together for Equality & Respect Action Plan 2013 – 2017 has just been released http://www.whe.org.au/newsite/documents/2014-09-17%20TFER_Action%20Plan_Final.pdf*

About Women's Health East

Women's Health East is a regional women's health promotion agency working across the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne towards a vision of equality, empowerment, health and wellbeing for all women. A not-for-profit agency funded primarily by the Victorian Department of Health, we advocate for gender equity and work to improve the health and wellbeing of girls and women. Our health promotion priorities include:

- Preventing Violence Against Women
- Sexual & Reproductive Health
- Gender Equity for Health Outcomes

03 9851 3700 health@whe.org.au www.whe.org.au

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