
Violence Against Women In Australia

The alleged rape and murder of comedian Euridyce Dixon has sparked anger about the attitudes towards women in our Australian society. This has created a spotlight on the issue of violence and abuse at the hands of men. This tragedy has outlined that women shouldn't fear violence and should have the right to feel safe within our country.

But what is the real meaning of violence against woman? To put it simply, using the international recognised definition, violence against women is any act of gender based violence that causes or could cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of harm or pressure, in public or in private life.

As this definition makes clear, violence against women is not only or always physical. It includes psychological, economic, emotional and sexual violence and abuse, and a wide range of controlling, coercive and intimidating behaviours.

Dixon's death has reignited the debate that it is men and not women whose attitudes need to change: Addressing the tragedy through the parliament, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said:

"What we must do as we grieve is ensure that we change the hearts of men to respect women." He said Australia needed to start "with the youngest men, the little boys, our sons and grandsons".

More than 80% of those who carry out murders and other violent crimes are men. Dixon's death has intensified a cultural debate about how young boys are raised to believe that women are beneath their consideration.

These stereotypes and perceptions of woman should be address and challenged at home. But not only should these issues be discussed and left up to parents, but also addressed in schooling and community groups, to work to encourage equality and respect together. Ways these can be achieved can be through a simple card game with stereotypical professions such a doctor or scientist, simply using male and female figures in both situations is an easy way for young children to adapt to the roles within society.

Women standing up for rights

Eurydice Dixon's death has outlined and strengthened the public stand that women have been making in the last 12 months against violence and abuse.

The rise of the #Me Too movement, following the exposure and arrest of Harvey Weinstein has drawn attention to the regularity of harassment.

The media's spotlight on this movement was created through comments by a senior police officer named David Clayton, who stated that people needed to "take responsibility for your safety". He followed this with "So just make sure you have situational awareness, that you're aware of your surroundings," he said. "If you've got a mobile phone, carry it; if you've got any

concerns, call the police.”

It was sensible advice. Yet this is the exact advice many women were sick of hearing. We are aware of “situational awareness” carrying keys in our hands in car parks, calling friends when walking alone at night, taking off headphones in case we are being followed. We are furious about the tiny conviction rate in rape cases, and the assumption that for a woman to remain safe, she must watch what she wears, what she says and what she does.

Yet, how are people expected to open up about such a horror when there’s no guarantee their harasser will serve justice? This was the case for a student in 2015. After being sexually assaulted while unconscious, she finally spoke out about her abuse. Yet despite her courage and opening up, her harasser served just six months in prison, after being recommended for 6 years. This is a clear example of how justice is no guarantee in such awful cases.

The hidden reality of domestic violence

The #Me Too movement has also come as Australia finally begins to publicly acknowledge domestic violence, a crime once ignored but now framed as a symptom of gender inequality. The hidden reality of domestic violence hides behind over 300,000 Australian women. These women have either experienced violence, sexual, physical and mentally. One in 3 women in Australia have experienced physical and / or sexual violence perpetrated by someone known to them. This high statistic demonstrates how it’s not just random people targeting women, but also people we know and love. It could be a neighbour, a family member, or even someone you’re sitting next to right now.

Financial Implications of Violence against women

Although violence is often shared around the media, what is not discussed is the financial cost to the country of dealing with the effects of violence against women. It is estimated that the total cost of health, administration, and social welfare services provided to women who were victims to violence is \$21.7 billion a year, and this cost is predicted to increase greatly if no action is taken.

In Australia we are a democracy that values freedom. As we value freedom, domestic violence is something that needs to be erased from our society completely, and we are the ones that can make a change, so let your voice be heard. And if you see something, say something.