

Statement

Economic abuse must be recognised as a driver of family violence

23 September 2020

Governments, the community and corporate Australia across the country must start rethinking their approaches to addressing family violence if they are serious about ending violence against women.

That is the view of Australia's leading community services organisation for women, Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand.

In its submission to the recent Federal Government Inquiry into Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence the organisation made a series of important recommendations, including acknowledging the role gendered disadvantage plays in driving family, domestic and sexual violence against women.

Good Shepherd is also urging the introduction of mandatory responses from the financial services sector to recognise financial abuse as a form of gendered violence against women. The recommendation would also compel the sector to strengthen its role in supporting women to address and resolve issues caused by economic abuse.

The CEO of Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand, Ms Stella Avramopoulos, said securing women's financial security was a critical aspect of achieving gender equality and would significantly contribute to the prevention of violence against women and their children.

"Gender inequality is a key driver of violence against women and their children. Our frontline staff work with women every day who are impacted by violence, and through this work we have a unique understanding of the role financial security and independence can play in the prevention of violence," Ms Avramopoulos said.

The current COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the precarious financial situation women across Australia are in, which is demonstrated by women in Victoria losing their jobs at five times the rate of men.

“The relationship between the economic insecurity women face through insecure work, low superannuation balances and financial abuse must be acknowledged, and our responses developed in relation to gendered violence,” Ms Avramopoulos said.

The Federal Inquiry into Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence was announced by the Minister for Women Marise Payne and the Minister for Social Services Senator Anne Ruston in June this year, and called for submissions to outline steps to improve Australia’s response to these issues. The aim of the inquiry is to inform the development of the Second National Action Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.

The announcement was a response to the failed inquiry established following the tragic death of Hannah Clarke and her children in Queensland, which sparked calls for serious and sustained action on addressing violence against women and their children.

“There have been numerous inquiries and consultations into the causes of family, domestic and sexual violence over the past decade and some of the recommendations implemented have had a positive impact,” Ms Avramopoulos said.

“However, this new inquiry gives us an opportunity to consider all that has come before now and to rethink reform. We cannot afford to drop the ball on this again and we must begin to link the devastating impact of economic abuse and gender inequality with violence against women. Only then can we develop sustainable, meaningful and long-term solutions for women and their children and end the scourge of family violence.”

“The prevention of violence against women and their children is a whole of community responsibility and we must make sure no woman seeking safety falls through the cracks.”

ENDS.

