

## Rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity

Violence against women is preventable. To stop this violence before it starts, we need to address the social conditions that drive it – the four gendered drivers. **Rigid gender roles and stereotypes** is one of these drivers, where fixed beliefs and assumptions are held that men and women are naturally suited to different tasks and responsibilities or have personalities, likes, dislikes, desires, interests and abilities that aren't based on their individual personalities but their gender.

### What rigid gender roles and stereotypes can sound like

Assuming women will do the cleaning, cooking or administrative tasks at work or community events.

Men as the primary breadwinner; women as the primary home keeper/child carer

Thinking men are 'naturally' more violent and driven by uncontrollable sexual urges'

Messages received from family, friends, advertising and the media influence people from a young age to take up limited and stereotyped gender roles and identities. For example, the belief that men should be tough and dominant often means that boys and men feel like they shouldn't cry, show emotions or demonstrate abilities to play caring roles; and the belief that women should be nurturing, 'lady-like' or sexually

appealing means women and girls often feel pressure to behave in certain ways to meet these expectations. People who strongly believe in these stereotypes are more likely to condone violence; men who hold traditional, hierarchical views about gender roles and relationships are more likely to use violence; and women who strongly adhere to them may be less likely to identify and report violence.<sup>3</sup>

### What are the gendered drivers?

The evidence base tells us that gender inequality creates the social conditions for violence against women to occur. There are four key expressions of gender inequality that have been found to predict or drive this violence. To prevent violence against women, we must focus our efforts on addressing these drivers.<sup>2</sup>

1. Condoning of violence against women
2. Men's control of decision making and limits to women's independence in public life and relationships
3. **Rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity**
4. Male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women.

# What rigid gender roles and stereotypes look like in daily life

## Addressing different levels and contexts in prevention

Looking at how rigid gender roles and stereotypes manifest within different settings where people live, learn, work, socialise and play can help you to plan your approach to addressing them. The more areas across society where limiting constructions of femininity and masculinity are challenged and rejected, the more influence and positive change we will create.



## Societal level

Assumptions that men are more practical, rational and decisive than women. This can result in women being underrepresented in leadership or decision making roles because they are perceived as being less capable.

The double standard where men displaying assertiveness and leadership qualities are admired and respected, while women with the same qualities may be considered bossy or cold.

## Institutional / systemic level

Distinct and inflexible roles and practices for men and women within many religious institutions.

The lesser value of women's sporting achievements demonstrated through lower professional athletes' salaries, media coverage and sponsorship opportunities.

## Organisational / community level

Gendered dress codes and school uniforms that restrict girls' movement and limit their capacity to participate in sports and other activities.

Unequal parental leave policies available for men and women in organisations based on the stereotype and expectation that women will be the main family caregiver.

Messages such as 'man up', 'boys don't cry' and 'don't be such a girl' put pressure on men and boys to hide their fear, sadness or pain. These messages also belittle girls and women.

## Individual / relationship level

Asking people in a same-sex relationship who is 'the man' and who is 'the woman'.

# How can we change this?

To prevent violence against women we must take action to address the gendered drivers.

## Actions that will prevent violence against women:

### 1. CHALLENGE

condoning of violence against women

### 2. PROMOTE

women's independence and decision-making

### 3. CHALLENGE

**gender stereotypes and roles**

### 4. STRENGTHEN

positive, equal and respectful relationships

To address stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity we must **foster positive personal identities and challenge gender stereotypes and roles**. This means supporting people to critique and reject rigid gender roles, and to develop personal identities that are not constrained or limited by gender stereotypes.<sup>4</sup>

For example:

- using the arts to raise awareness of gender stereotypes and explore alternative forms of masculinity and femininity
- implementing workplace policies that tackle biases in recruitment and training

- promoting flexible employment conditions for working fathers
- promoting gender equitable parenting and domestic practices
- undertaking activities that promote and encourage women and girls' participation in sport and STEM subjects.



<sup>1</sup> ANROWS, (2018). *Australians' attitudes to violence against women and gender equality. Findings from the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS)*, Sydney, NSW.

<sup>2</sup> Our Watch, ANROWS and VicHealth, (2015). *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*, Melbourne, Australia.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p25.

<sup>4</sup> Our Watch, (2017). *Putting the prevention of violence against women into practice: How to Change the story*, Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia.