



# The Problem with a Feminist Approach to Domestic Violence in Australia

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## Abstract

This report critically examines the limitations of the feminist and gender-based framework in addressing domestic violence and argues for an evidence-based approach which considered power and control dynamics. While feminist perspectives have played an essential role in advancing women's rights and safety, they have also created a gendered bias that overlooks male victimisation and female perpetration of domestic violence.

Drawing on thirteen academic papers (2008–2025), this report reviews literature that explores gender symmetry in domestic violence, historical changes in gender roles, and the influence of dark personality traits such as psychopathy and narcissism. These studies consistently demonstrate that domestic violence is often bidirectional or mutual, with both men and women capable of using control, manipulation, and aggression in intimate relationships. Researchers such as Archer (2000), Straus (2014), and Buttell and Starr (2012) provide compelling evidence that gender alone does not determine patterns of abuse.

The author also critiques how policy, research funding, and training in Australia continue to be shaped by feminist ideology, leading to underreporting of male victims, bias in data interpretation, and ineffective intervention models. Scholars such as Abrams (2016) and Ranjan et al. (2025) highlight how maintaining domestic violence as a “*women's issue*” sustains funding advantages but prevents genuine progress.

Ultimately, the findings indicate that domestic violence should be reframed as a human behaviour issue, not a gendered one. A gender-blind framework, focused on behaviour, personality, and power dynamics, would promote fairer support services, improve prevention strategies, and better reflect the realities of modern relationships. True progress requires moving beyond ideology toward inclusive, evidence-driven reform that protects all victims and holds all perpetrators accountable.

## Introduction

Domestic violence continues to be a widespread issue affecting all socioeconomic groups, and cultural backgrounds. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) reports that roughly one in three women worldwide experience physical or sexual violence, most often from intimate partners. Yet, research suggests that men also represent a considerable share of victims but frequently underreport due to stigma and societal expectations around masculinity (Archer & Coyne, 2005). Some researchers even state that equal numbers of men and women are perpetrators of domestic violence (Buttall & Starr, 2012, Tetreault, Bates & Bolam, 2018, & Straus, 2008). Despite this reality, the Australian Government and its funded research bodies continue to reject the existence of the female perpetrator. Therefore, the dominant ideology (i.e. women are victims, men are perpetrators) is accepted and supported through research which often only focuses on the experiences of female victims. Many of which are clients of the feminist support services that rely heavily on an increasing number of female victims to continue to receive Government funding. The research used by Australian policy makers continues to be biased toward men and seeks to perpetuate the profitable narrative of the female victim who only commit violence to protect themselves. Hence, this report will highlight the hidden research which reports on studies showing that the dominant narrative on domestic violence in Australia is significantly flawed.

## What is Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence (or DV) also known as ‘family violence’ or ‘intimate partner violence (IPV)’, is a pattern of physical and/or non-physical abusive behaviour which is part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated against an intimate partner. These behaviours can include emotional manipulation (coercive control), physical violence, financial control as well as threats to harm their partner or spouse. The victim will often feel isolated and alone and unable to escape the situation they are in.

## The Origins of the Domestic Violence Movement

Feminism is the belief in and advocacy for social, political, and economic equality between women and men. However there has always been an undertone of dislike of men and this has become even more prominent and public today including hashtags like *#killallmen*. Men are regularly blamed for domestic violence with feminism introducing the narrative of “*gender-based violence*”, suggesting that violence in the home is in one direction from a man toward a woman. This narrative goes as far as to acknowledge women’s violence as a response to the male partners abuse and hence is retaliatory or protective in nature.

The feminist approach to domestic violence, stemmed from the women’s rights movement of the 1970’s and interprets domestic violence as a ‘*consequence of patriarchal power structures*’, emphasising systemic gender inequality and prioritises female victims (Andrus, 2020). While this perspective has played a crucial role in advancing women’s rights and directing resources to female survivors, critics contend that it can inadvertently marginalise male victims by framing domestic violence as predominantly a women’s issue (Dutton, 2006). In contrast, addressing domestic violence without preconceived notions about gender, prioritises all victims, regardless of gender, and promotes an understanding of domestic violence that is unbiased. Critics of the feminist approach, including Dutton (2006) and Straus (2008), argue that this framework can marginalise male victims by minimising their experiences or framing them as exceptions, potentially leading to an understanding that inadvertently overlooks the needs of men or perpetuates stereotypes about masculinity. Hence a better understanding of why men have been largely excluded as victims and women not recognised as perpetrators. Therefore, the overarching aim of this report was to review academic literature to produce

an understanding of why balanced and impartial interventions are necessary to ensure that no victim is overlooked in the pursuit of justice and recovery from domestic violence.

## Background

On 10<sup>th</sup> October 2025, at the Australian Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee meeting, Australian Senator Malcolm Roberts confronted the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), a taxpayer funded research organisation. Representatives from the AIFS, were questioned by Senator Roberts claiming that their approach to research on domestic violence was dishonest and neglected to recognise the role of female perpetrators of domestic violence. He asked AIFS if they were “*peddling feminist propaganda at taxpayers’ expense*”. He expresses concern that their recent report (Arndt, 2025) informs both government policy and funding of services and research yet does not show the true nature of domestic violence in Australia. Courageous Australians in positions of power have begun to create waves leading to political figures speaking up in the hope of a more balanced approach to understanding domestic violence in Australia. The hope is that this report will contribute to this discussion by highlighting empirical studies previously overlooked by feminist institutions and researchers.

Non-feminist and gender-blind research challenges the dominant narrative which suggests that men experience domestic violence at rates comparable to women, though the nature, severity, and reporting of such violence can differ. A *gender-blind or gender-neutral approach* is an approach which provides support and interventions based on individual circumstances, without making assumptions or prioritising needs according to gender. Studies, such as Archer (2000), indicate that both men and women perpetrate intimate partner violence at similar rates, with bidirectional aggression common in relationships. For instance, the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (Smith et al., 2010) found that 1 in 4 men reported experiencing physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner. However, men’s victimisation is often underreported due to fear of societal stigma and the view that abused men are weak. Critics of a gender-blind approach to domestic violence maintain that men’s violence is typically more severe and rooted in patriarchal control, which can overshadow the experiences of male victims. Nevertheless, the evidence of gender symmetry highlights the need for inclusive support systems that assist both male and female victims equally, prompting a reassessment of current intervention frameworks.

## Present understanding Domestic Violence

The feminist approach to domestic violence has become the dominant view largely due to its historical roots and influence on policy, advocacy, and public awareness. This approach highlighted the widespread victimisation of women and successfully drew attention to their need for protection, support, legal reform and the establishment of women’s shelters and crisis services. Media and advocacy campaigns have reinforced the current narrative, often portraying women as the primary victims and men as predominant perpetrators. As a result, public perceptions, professional training, and government funding have prioritised female victims, perpetuating the feminist framework as the mainstream lens through which domestic violence is understood. However, when female perpetration of violence is raised, it is downplayed suggesting that women only use violence out of a response to men’s violence and frustration (Salter & Woodlock, 2022). Salter and Woodlock (2022) suggest that it should be called “*a use of force*” and not domestic violence when women use violence. Nevertheless, while the feminist approach has driven some progress in addressing violence against women, it can be argued that this view marginalises male victims and hinders inclusive support systems. While society continues to focus on ‘misogyny’ as the main cause of domestic violence (ANROWS, 2023), change will forever be thwarted by entrenched feminist gendered assumptions.

*“True gender equality requires that both men and women have equal access to human rights protections under the law”* (Ranjan, Jindal, & Harjeet, 2025, p.6), and domestic violence should be no different. Traditionally marriages were considered dominated by men (Katz, 2014 & Gbaguidi, & Kassin, (2018), however in 2025 this is the exception rather than the norm and many women now hold power in a relationship, with some surpassing that of their spouse. In the early twentieth century, judges regularly and enthusiastically protected female victims of domestic violence in divorce and criminal cases. Yet, men who sought protection against physically abusive wives were deemed weak and undeserving of the same legal solutions provided to women (Katz, 2014). However, as women have moved into male spaces and professional roles which were previously not afforded to them, they have also gained a level of power and control which has potentially flowed into the home. Women use to be solely responsible for domestic duties including care of the children, cooking and cleaning. Today this is less common and now seen as oppressive, with modern women believing a man should have equal responsibility for tasks in the home regardless of how work outside the home is divided. As gender roles and power dynamics within relationships change, it is crucial to consider how these inform contemporary understandings of domestic violence.

Power and control are central mechanisms in perpetration of domestic violence. Individuals with dark personality traits such as those in the Dark Tetrad have been shown to indicate a person's predisposition to commit both physical and non-physical domestic violence. The Dark Tetrad is a personality framework encompassing narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and sadism, characterized by self-centeredness, manipulation, lack of empathy, and deriving pleasure from others' suffering. Both men and women exhibiting these dark personality traits engage in manipulative, dominating, and coercive behaviours within intimate relationships, seeking to assert authority and diminish their partner's autonomy. Psychopathy is the greatest predictor of a perpetrator with research showing that while men with psychopathic traits are more likely to display physical aggression and verbal explosiveness, women with similar dark traits are more prone to verbal abuse and psychological manipulation (Tetreault et al., 2018). This pattern underscores the importance of recognising that the use of power and control in domestic violence is not exclusive to one gender, but rather reflects broader dysfunctional interpersonal dynamics rooted in personality pathology. Such insights are crucial for developing a nuanced understanding of domestic violence which considers the complex interplay of personality, power, and aggression among both male and female perpetrators.

### **Australian Attitudes toward Domestic Violence**

*Australian's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety* (ANROWS, 2023) found that 91% of Australian's believe that domestic violence is a problem for women, yet surprisingly when asked about their own neighbourhood or community they believed it was much less of an issue (47%). Suggesting that view is not based on what they are witnessing but instead based on what they are hearing from second hand sources such as mainstream media. The ANROWS (2023) survey continues with its 'women's safety' agenda by claiming that survey participants who believed that men and women commit violence at equal rates were simply 'incorrect'. The report states, *“...considerable proportions of respondents incorrectly believed that men and women equally perpetrate domestic violence (41%) ...”* (ANROWS, 2023, p.23), going further to say that these individuals applied a “gender-ignoring” lens. Additionally, the report pushes the narrative that those who are not concerned with gender equality are also not concerned with violence against women. However, it is important to note that research on domestic violence in Nordic countries which have the highest levels of equality report the same domestic violence statistics as western countries such as Australia and therefore *equality* cannot be considered a predictor of domestic violence (Gracia & Merlo, 2016).

In Australia, the feminist agenda has a firm grip on the domestic violence narrative which continues to be perpetuated by mainstream media. Even with the likes of Senator Roberts being brave

enough to take the taxpayer funded researchers to task about their biased approach, more needs to be done. Without a unwillingness to look beyond violence against women, change will never occur. Hence this report looked at some of the key research which has been overlooked by Government and the relentless feminist agenda.

## Method

A literature-based qualitative analysis was conducted, drawing upon academic literature which has predominately been excluded from Australia's response to domestic violence. The aim of this report was to critically examine literature which challenges the dominant feminist narrative of domestic violence (women as victims and men as perpetrators).

The objectives were to:

1. Examine significant literature on domestic violence which suggests that domestic violence is not a gendered issue.
2. Critically analyse the literature identified by experts in the research field of gender-blind domestic violence approaches.
3. Discuss how this research could contribute to changing attitudes and a new approach to a gender-blind domestic violence response.

## Data and Analysis

Academic journal articles were sourced from experts in the field of a gender-blind or gender-symmetry understanding of domestic violence as well as papers which demonstrated female perpetration of violence. Additionally, it was important to also include papers that talked about domestic violence in historical context and the changes in gender roles within our society dating back to the early 20th century. This allowed for an argument that demonstrates how the understanding of domestic violence, and the context within which it is supported and judged, is rooted in a changing society. Papers on dark personality traits and domestic violence were also included to expand the understanding of power and control as it relates to men and women differently. These were included to highlight a new narrative which could better provide an understanding and prediction and domestic violence.

This was not a systematic review and therefore papers were selected rather than searched through traditional means. However, all papers which were included had a full text review. Papers which were not examined in full were not included.

The thirteen papers that were reviewed, published between 2008 and 2025, were authored by knowledgeable experts in the field who advocate for changes to the domestic violence system. Additional papers on dark personality traits and the use of domestic violence as a means for increasing power and control were viewed. These papers were analysed to understand what role shifting power dynamics and dark personalities play when looking at domestic violence and to understand domestic violence from a dominance perspective. Moreover, this also draws on the author's expertise regarding dark personalities, and the tactics women with this predisposition may typically employ to target a male partner that have rarely been considered in the domestic violence space.

The analysis involved a thematic literature review which summarised the key papers and how they contribute to the non-dominant narrative in the space of domestic violence. Key findings and discrepancies in the feminist narrative will be highlighted. A thematic analysis is an effective way of conducting a qualitative review and considering key themes across documents and in this case, this refers to literature and key research findings of the reviewed papers.

## Results

The thirteen (13) papers included in these results were reviewed in full, with particular focus on the key findings which have been summarised in Table 1.

*Table 1 – Summary of the findings from the reviewed papers*

| Author(s)                                     | Key Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Abrams (2016)                                 | Argues that the initial domestic violence movement focused on women as victims and men as perpetrators, preserving funding and professional advancement for women. Acknowledges male victims but resists recognising women as perpetrators, citing concerns over discrediting women's victim experiences and risking the success of the movement. Raises issues about reporting female violence and suggests complexity in women's use of violence, including victim response and attempts to gain power and control. |
| Buttall & Starr (2012)                        | Contrast the gender paradigm, which attributes domestic violence to patriarchy and male aggression, with the family violence paradigm, which supports social learning as a cause. Thirty years of research shows women perpetrate domestic violence at rates similar to men, not only in self-defence. Gender paradigm masks female violence and hinders intervention; a more inclusive approach is needed to understand household power dynamics.                                                                    |
| Collison & Lynam (2021)                       | Meta-analysis of 163 studies found that antisocial and borderline personality disorders are strongly associated with both perpetration and victimisation in domestic violence. Personality disorders relate to dysfunction in interpersonal interactions, making it difficult to distinguish perpetrator from victim. Victims may lack autonomy, contributing to unhealthy conflict responses.                                                                                                                        |
| Carton & Egan (2017)                          | Found strong links between psychopathy and domestic violence perpetration. People high in psychopathy displayed dominance, intimidation, possessiveness, jealousy, and criticism. Emphasise that focusing only on perpetrator behaviour without considering partner behaviour limits effective violence reduction.                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Gbaguidi & Kassim (2018)                      | Reviewed the changing landscape of female domination in African society, noting that female perpetration of violence is rarely acknowledged in male-dominated cultures. As women gain superior positions, they may adopt roles and behaviours previously dominated by men, including perpetrating violence in the home.                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Gondolf (2014)                                | Claimed that women do not affect how their violent partners behave and that female perpetration rates are low, often explained as self-defence. In contrast, other analyses suggest mutual combat is common and female-initiated violence is substantial.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Katz (2014)                                   | Explored the historical context of domestic violence, noting early 20th-century judicial protection of women and evolving women's rights. Highlights that men also experience abuse but do not receive the same judicial response, and advocates for evidence-based approaches free from gender bias.                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Ranjan, Jindal & Harjeet (2025)               | Argue for gender-neutral domestic violence laws, recognising men as victims and women as perpetrators. Traditional gender roles obscure female perpetration but shifting dynamics in the home necessitate further study on underreporting of violence against men and the consequences of gender-biased laws, including false allegations and lack of recourse for men.                                                                                                                                               |
| Straus (2008, 2011, 2014) (3 papers)          | Demonstrated gender symmetry in domestic violence, with mutual violence most prevalent, followed by female-only and then male-only violence. Severe violence is rare but mainly perpetrated by males, with women suffering greater injury. Found that women initiate violence in many cases, and psychological abuse has significant consequences. Emphasised that ignoring female violence hinders prevention and treatment, and that ostracism persists for those who challenge feminist narratives.                |
| Tetreault, Bates & Bolam (2018)               | Studied university students in Sweden and the UK, finding women more verbally aggressive and men more physically and verbally abusive outside the home. No gender differences in overall perpetration rates, but psychopathy predicted higher verbal and physical aggression. Evidence challenges traditional feminist models and calls for broader perspectives in domestic violence training.                                                                                                                       |
| Varley Thornton, Graham-Kevan & Archer (2010) | Found women committed significantly more violence than men in relationships, with crime risk factors consistent except for domestic violence. Women used different tactics and men were more likely not to report. Mutual combat is a significant factor in high rates of both male and female perpetrators and victims.                                                                                                                                                                                              |

This literature review found four (4) key themes which were:

1. Domestic violence is not a gendered issue
2. Female perpetration of domestic violence exists but is largely disregarded
3. Violence is about power and control rather than gender
4. Underreporting by male victims hides the full picture

Table 2 provides details of how each paper reviewed corresponds with the four themes, followed by a narrative on each theme.

*Table 2 – Authors of reviewed papers against responses to key themes*

| Author(s)                       | 1.DV is not a gendered issue                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 2.Female perpetration of DV exists but is largely disregarded                                                                                       | 3. Violence is about power and control rather than gender                                                                                       | 4.Underreporting by male victims hides the full picture                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Abrams (2016)                   | Sees DV as a gendered issue but acknowledges female perpetrators of DV need to be considered.                                                                                                                                 | Framing DV as women's issue preserves funding and services for women. The legacy should be maintained.                                              | Women seeking power and control leading to violence stemming from the feminist movement                                                         | Men are expected to commit violence – for women something went wrong. Women's advancement is more important than seeing men as victims. |
| Buttall & Starr (2012)          | A gendered approach masks female violence when women perpetrate violence as much as men.                                                                                                                                      | Women perpetrate DV at rates similar to men, not only in self-defence                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                 | Gender paradigm masks female violence and hinders intervention                                                                          |
| Collison & Lynam (2021)         | DV can be attributed to both personality disorders and ways of dealing with conflict which can come from either partner. Hence an understanding DV which looks at how a couple interacts could be useful as both play a role. | Emotional reactivity could relate to an escalation of DV.                                                                                           | Personality types which seek power and control have unhealthy ways of managing conflict. This can make it hard to tell perpetrator from victim. |                                                                                                                                         |
| Carton & Egan (2017)            | DV is often provoked by the other party.                                                                                                                                                                                      | Dark personality traits imbedded in power and control predict violence perpetration. Dark traits are present in men and women.                      | Without considering partner behaviour limits effective violence reduction.                                                                      | High levels of manipulation by women with dark traits hinders men's reporting.                                                          |
| Gbaguidi & Kassim (2018)        | Women's increasing dominance challenges and gradually deconstructs traditional patriarchal structures.                                                                                                                        | Female domination and the maltreatment of men are often unacknowledged                                                                              | Women's domination over men has become increasingly visible.                                                                                    | Female dominance over men is untold                                                                                                     |
| Gondolf (2014)                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Women cause less damage, so it is less important than men's violence                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                         |
| Katz (2014)                     | Women were provided protection; male victims were not. Male perpetrators were charged; judges were unwilling to prosecute female perpetrators.                                                                                | In the early 20 <sup>th</sup> Century men received criminal responses to DV however there was confusion about how to deal with female perpetrators. | Early judicial responses to DV reinforced power dynamics in relationships with the woman being dependent on her husband.                        | Male victims are often trivialized or ridiculed when abused by their wife.                                                              |
| Ranjan, Jindal & Harjeet (2025) | DV is no longer a gendered issue due to changing family dynamics.                                                                                                                                                             | Current legal frameworks support and assume the female is the victim.                                                                               | Changes in socioeconomic conditions and family structures highlight that DV affects all genders.                                                | Societal stigma and underreporting mean male victims' experiences often go unrecognised.                                                |
| Straus (2008)                   | Bidirectional DV is the most common group followed by female to male violence.                                                                                                                                                | Female dominance is strongly associated with female perpetration of DV                                                                              | Dominance, not gender is associated with DV                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                         |
| Straus (2011)                   | The same number of men and women assault their partner.                                                                                                                                                                       | Female violence is ignored in prevention programs.                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                         |

*Table 2 Continued – Authors of reviewed papers against responses to key themes*

| Author(s)                                     | 1.DV is not a gendered issue                                                                                   | 2.Female perpetration of DV exists but is largely disregarded                                                  | 3. Violence is about power and control rather than gender                                                                | 4.Underreporting by male victims hides the full picture |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Straus (2014)                                 | To protect women from revictimization they should be included in behaviour change programs with their partner. | When a female partner is violent a man is 4 times more likely to reoffend after behaviour change program.      |                                                                                                                          |                                                         |
| Tetreault, Bates & Bolam (2018)               | Most DV is bidirectional                                                                                       | Women are both perpetrators and victims of DV                                                                  | Dark traits predict the use of DV in men and women. Men use more psychical violence, and women use more verbal violence. |                                                         |
| Varley Thornton, Graham-Kevan & Archer (2010) | Women perpetrated more violence than men                                                                       | Women are more likely violence in the home whereas men are more likely to commit violence outside of the home. |                                                                                                                          | Men are more likely to not report than women            |

The reviewed literature will be addressed against each theme in the following paragraphs.

### **Theme 1 - Domestic violence is not a gendered issue**

The domestic violence space has changed, resulting in a need for gender neutral laws where men can be recognised as victims and women as perpetrators (Ranjan et al., 2025). In a study by Ranjan et al. (2025), they suggest that social norms based on traditional gender roles blind society from seeing women as perpetrators of domestic violence. However, these traditional structures which see the woman caring for the home and children and the man working to financially provide are no longer the norm but instead they are the exception. Hence moving to a gender-neutral approach to understanding domestic violence as “spousal” or “partner abuse” rather than violence against women would allow for a more balanced and inclusive response to domestic violence (Ranjan et al., 2025).

One of the most influential academics to research a non-gendered approach to domestic violence was Professor Murray Straus (who passed away in 2016) has advocated for the notion that women commit violence at the same rates as men. Much of his work included extensively reviewing studies this included a published study in 2011 where he examined 200 studies on domestic violence finding that women and men commit domestic violence at equal rates, however he did state that severe violence in clinical populations is rare yet mainly perpetrated by males and that women suffer greater injury and even death (Straus, 2011). The study also found that self-defence as an argument for women’s violence only accounted for between 5-15%. Conversely, eight studies which looked at who hit first it was found that women initiated the violence from 30 to 73% of the time. In another study, Straus (2008) revealed that bi-directional violence was the most common followed by female-only and then male-only domestic violence. Self-defence was raised as a motive for women’s violence however the study found that this was only a factor in a minor number of cases yet could be a factor in bi-directional violence.

The idea of removing the gender narrative from domestic violence is not new. Buttell and Starr (2012) discussed two different paradigms when considering family violence being “gender” (women as victims) and “family violence” (gender-blind). The gender paradigm states that domestic violence is result of the “patriarchy” with men being the aggressors and women being the victims, following the same lines as the feminist approach to domestic violence. Alternatively, the family violence theory

rejects the gendered narrative, instead supporting social learning which can predict the likelihood of violence. Buttell and Starr (2012) go on to state that thirty years of research shows women perpetrate domestic violence at rates similar to men, and not only in self-defence. Hence the dominant gender paradigm (feminist perspective) put simply, masks female violence and hinders the opportunities to both identify and intervene in female violence occurring in the home. Therefore, Buttell and Starr (2012) like Ranjan et al. (2025) advocate for an inclusive approach to understanding domestic violence which provides a better understanding of the power dynamics in the home.

## **Theme 2 - Female perpetration of domestic violence exists but is largely disregarded**

Abrams (2016) argues from a feminist perspective for acknowledging female perpetrators of domestic violence, noting that the movement historically framed domestic violence as *men abusing women* to secure funding, services, and professional advantage. While male victims are now accepted, female perpetration is not. Therefore, recognizing gender symmetry is deemed a threat to the experiences of female victims and the domestic violence movement. Abrams (2016) argues for the importance of the double standard: women's violence is excused as reactive, requiring contextual "understanding," while men's is not and statistical reporting of female violence must be minimized to avoid diluting domestic violence as a women's issue. Ultimately, Abrams warns that promoting equal perpetration rates confuses policymakers, funding, and public perception of domestic violence as gendered violence against women.

Gondolf (2014) claimed women do not influence how their violent partners behave, yet Straus (2014) he found the opposite when examining the same data. Gondolf (2014) claimed that 22% violence by women was "low" which Straus (2014) says is a flawed interpretation given the stated rate for men perpetrating violence (33%). Straus (2014) agrees that 22% (women's violence) and 33% (men's violence) is not significant enough to claim that women's violence is minimal and claims Gondolf seeks to mislead the reader into believing women rarely commit domestic violence. Gondolf (2014) explains violence by women as self-defence, yet only 44% of women said that their physical violence towards their male partner was self-defence. Yet Straus (2014) goes on to suggest that Gondolf (2014) is trying to manipulate the reader to support the narrative that women only commit violence as victims. In a telling admission, Gondolf (2014) highlighted that in 8 out of 10 cases it is the female that initiated the violence. In Straus's (2014) analysis he found that in 80% of cases where a male has been in a behaviour change program it is his female partner that reactivates the violence. Straus (2014) suggests it would be important to consider the inclusion of women in behaviour change programs with their male partners because violence by men does not occur in isolation, with Straus (2014) reporting that 40% of women initiated the violence post intervention period.

Controversially, Varley Thornton, Graham-Kevan and Archer (2010), found women committed significantly more violence than men. It highlighted that crime risk factors were consistent across offending except when it came to domestic violence. Women used different tactics when perpetrating violence in the home and that men are more likely to commit violence outside of the home (Varley Thornton et al., 2010). Nevertheless, one of the key issues is that society does not want to see women as perpetrators of violence as it potentially associates them with the traits of toxic men which leads to us making excuses to avoid accountability (Abrams, 2016)

Tetreault et al. (2018) examined this issue through two different cohorts of university students ( $n=342$ ) in Sweden and the United Kingdom as both countries score high on gender empowerment and equality. Women were found to be more verbally aggressive than men with men reporting more physical and verbal abuse outside the home, which was consistent with findings from Varley Thornton et al. (2010). Tetreault et al. (2018) also found a correlation between the Dark Tetrad traits (psychopathy, narcissism, Machiavellianism and sadism) and aggression perpetration. They also found no gender

differences in the perpetration of domestic violence except that women are more verbally abusive than men. Psychopathy predicted men as more verbally explosive and physically aggressive in relationships and for psychopathic women this correlated with higher verbal abuse in relationships (Tetreault et al., 2018). The evidence indicates that women are more likely to use verbal abuse than men, challenging traditional feminist models and suggesting that a feminist approach alone may not adequately address the complexities of domestic violence.

Tetreault et al., (2018), Carton and Egan (2017) looked at dark traits and domestic violence and found a strong relationship between psychopathy and the perpetration of domestic violence. In a survey of 111 participants that people high in psychopathy used dominance and intimidation and displayed traits of possessiveness, jealousy and criticism. The authors highlight that focusing solely on the perpetrator's behaviour, without considering the contributing factors such as the partner's behaviour, limits our ability to effectively reduce violence (Carton & Egan, 2017).

### **Theme 3 - Violence is about power and control rather than gender**

The female empowerment movement has led to women seeking power and control contributing to violence in the home (Abrams, 2016). Gbaguidi and Kassin, (2018) reviewed the changing gender dynamics landscape describing how female domination over men is rarely acknowledged and this is seen as even more prominent in male dominated cultures such as Africa. Gbaguidi and Kassin (2018) challenges and deconstructs patriarchal structures with violence and decision making no longer exclusively a "male privilege".

Straus (2008) also examined gender symmetry in domestic violence in a large sample of university students ( $n=13,601$ ) across 32 nations. The study found that dominance played a significant role in the use of violence and that it was not gender but control, dominance and power that were the biggest indicators domestic violence perpetration. This suggests that as women seek control, dominance and power they are likely to also be more prone to committing domestic violence in the home. This study supported this concept, finding that in female only perpetration of domestic violence showing as the female increased on the dominance scale, they were also more likely to commit violence (Straus, 2008).

In a meta-analysis of 163 studies, Collison and Lynam (2021) found that antisocial and borderline personality disorder (dark traits as categorised by psychologists) demonstrates the most robust size across perpetration and victimisation of domestic violence. The study found that people who were insecure and had difficulty expressing disagreement could result in handling conflict in unhealthy and potentially aggressive ways (Collison & Lynam, 2021). This paper suggests that violence is not something that occurs in isolation and that sometimes victims play a role (Collison & Lynam, 2021). Part of this includes the victim perceiving that they have no autonomy in the situation that they cannot respond and or leave which was also identified by Carton and Egan (2017). Hence by seeing a victim as just a victim with no power can communicate a level of disempowerment which leaves a victim frozen in place unable to act. Programs which empower people to act may provide tools to overcome the dark traits of their partner instead of remaining a perpetual victim of violence in the home.

### **Theme 4 - Underreporting by male victims hides the full picture**

Abrams (2016) suggests that drawing attention to male victims diminishes the impact on female victims and compromises the developed expertise, confuses policy makers and would lead to a loss of identity for the feminist movement. However, continuing to argue for a gendered approach not only distorts public perception but also influences legal frameworks in ways that obscure the reality of women's violence and reinforces the stigma for male victims. Varley Thornton et al. (2010) stated that

domestic violence is underreported yet men are less likely to report a victim status than women. Ranjan et al. (2025) suggests that societal stigma results in men not reporting, with Katz (2014) suggesting that a further contributing factor is the trivialisation of abuse against men by women. There is an expectation that men will commit violence, yet when women perpetrate violence in the home there is an assumption that something went wrong (Abrams, 2016). Nevertheless, Varley Thornton et al. (2010), suggest mutual combat in relationships plays a significant role in the high number of both perpetrators and victims of domestic violence.

Women's advancement has been highlighted as one reason not to recognise men as victims of domestic violence (Abrams, 2016). It is through female empowerment that there is a lack of willingness in the domestic violence space to see females as capable of committing violence leaving it largely hidden (Gbaguidi & Kassin, 2018). It is important to consider that with empowerment comes power and as women gain power, they will often display dark traits which are associated with the perpetration of domestic violence (Carton & Egan, 2017). Nevertheless, while the feminist gendered narrative continues female violence will remain masked and continue to hinder opportunities for intervention (Buttall & Starr, 2012).

## Discussion

This report acknowledges the horrific abuse some women have and do suffer at the hands of abusive men who cause serious harm and sometimes even death. This behaviour should never be excused. Additionally, there are men that have suffered at the hands of female partners left too ashamed and embarrassed to report the abuse as domestic violence. Men too have lost their lives to domestic violence at the hands of bad female partners. Just as we should never make excuses for the bad behaviour of men, we also should not make excuses for the bad behaviour of women. While we continue to ridicule men for being victims, we are causing further harm to women and children. We are demonstrating to boys that women are allowed to be violent, and we are communicating to girls that abusing your male partner is strength and power. Female empowerment is important, but it should never be at the expense of the rights of others.

Several papers critically examine the dominant feminist approach, which historically has framed domestic violence as a problem of male perpetration against female victims. Authors such as Buttall and Starr (2012) and Straus (2008, 2011, 2014) present strong evidence of significant underreporting of male victimisation and female perpetration. These researchers advocate for a gender-neutral lens, arguing that the feminist paradigm not only distorts public perception but also influences legal frameworks in ways that obscure the reality of women's violence and reinforce stigma for male victims. A caution was presented by Abrams (2016), who broadened the narrative to include male victims and female perpetrators yet suggested that this conversation risks diluting support for female victims. However, this also suggests that male victims are less important and that women should be supported at the expense of men. Importantly, the consensus should be that the exclusion of male victims from the conversation is both empirically and ethically unjustified.

A substantial body of quantitative and qualitative research, including studies by Varley Thornton et al. (2010), Straus (2014), Buttall and Starr (2012), and Gbaguidi and Kassin (2018), reveals that women perpetrate domestic violence at rates similar to men. In fact, mutual or bidirectional violence emerges as the predominant pattern in many cases, and there are even instances where female-only perpetration exceeds that of males (Varley Thornton et al., 2010). This evidence challenges the prevailing narrative and underscores the importance of shifting the focus from gender to the dynamics of power, control, and dominance as the true drivers of abuse. It is important to note, however, that while perpetration may be comparable, women, on average, often suffer greater injury or severe outcomes relating to biological strength sex differences, and this distinction must be recognised in any balanced analysis.

## **Recommendations**

To cement the findings of this report the author makes three (3) key recommendations from the evidence and analysis in this document. The following recommendations are for the readers consideration:

1. Domestic violence risk assessment tools should include questions which relate to who holds power in the home and how the couple responds and interacts during conflict.
2. Training for law enforcement should include female perpetration of domestic violence and the dynamics of power in relationships.
3. Governments and Universities need to embrace and fund research which challenges the gendered narrative of domestic violence.

### **Recommendation 1 – Domestic violence risk assessment tools should include questions which relate to who holds power in the home and how the couple responds and interacts during conflict.**

Tetreault et al. (2018), Carton and Egan (2017), and Collison and Lynam (2021), delve into the influence of dark personality traits on both perpetration and victimisation. Their findings converge on the idea that such traits such as psychopathy or narcissism, are strongly linked to abusive behaviour, regardless of gender. For example, women were found to exhibit more verbal aggression, whereas men displayed more physical aggression (Tetreault et al., 2018). Nevertheless, both genders engaged in similar levels of abuse when dark personality traits were present. Notably, Collison and Lynam (2021) observe that victim and perpetrator roles can be fluid, particularly among individuals with certain personality disorders, resulting in mutual aggression and unhealthy conflict responses. This approach signals a need to move beyond gendered models and consider the psychological and relational factors that underlie violence.

### **Recommendation 2 – Training for law enforcement should include female perpetration of domestic violence and the dynamics of power in relationships.**

The literature identifies significant shortcomings present in current domestic violence training, most notably the lack of emphasis on female perpetration and on the psychological factors that fuel abuse. This gap is highlighted by Tetreault et al., (2018) and Abrams (2016), who stress that training and policy interventions must evolve to become more evidence-based and balanced. Recognising the full spectrum of victim and perpetrator experiences means addressing the stigma that male victims face, acknowledging the prevalence of mutual or bidirectional violence, and incorporating psychological assessments into both prevention and intervention strategies.

### **Recommendation 3 – Governments and Universities need to embrace and fund research which challenges the gendered narrative of domestic violence.**

There was a time when academia was dominated by men who were concerned with research rigor and the truth, allowing for research topics to be explored regardless of public opinion. However, in the current day, research which challenges the narrative that women are oppressed is shut down by feminised academic institutions which focus more on equality than the truth (Clark & Winegard, 2022). Straus (2008) raises the issue of being ostracised if you dare to discuss publicly or in research that domestic violence is symmetrical and equally perpetrated by men and women. In the seventeen years since Straus made this statement in 2008, it still rings true with the dominant narrative is that of the feminists who refuse to recognise that women also commit domestic violence and that men are victims at higher rates than shown in the public statistics. Straus also comments that he has been discussing this problem for 35 years (since 1973) prior to the discussed paper and makes an important point that this has and continues to hinder both prevention and treatment of domestic violence. In Australia, the

Government continues to invest in services for women, research on women as victims and men as perpetrators yet the problem prevails. Hence rather than continuing to use the same approach yet expecting a different outcome is paramount to wilful blindness and even foolishness. If violence by women continues to be underexamined and unrecognised then this will continue to increase the victimisation of women given that when women commit violence, they are more likely to also receive a violent response in return (Straus, 2008).

### **Final Thoughts from the Author**

Ultimately, the research suggests that violence in intimate relationships is a multifaceted issue involving both men and women as potential perpetrators and victims. Shifting the analytical lens from gender to the underlying dynamics of power and personality offers a more accurate understanding of the problem and holds greater promise for protecting those most at risk. The persistence of domestic violence, despite decades of investment in predominantly gendered approaches, underscores the urgent need for reform. Only by acknowledging the full spectrum of experiences and focusing on the relational and psychological complexities of domestic violence can society hope to reduce harm and support all those affected.

Domestic violence is a major health issue here and across the globe, but we seem to continue to do the same things and use the same approaches, with domestic violence advocates arguing the problem is only growing greater. So why are we throwing more money at services and research that does nothing to enact change and perhaps makes the issue worse? Why are we not reevaluating the current strategies, because what we are doing is not working. We require a different approach because our society has an issue with violence and while we continue to just point fingers at the patriarchy, we are not finding solutions we're just justifying victimhood.

### **Future Directions and Limitations**

Most reviewed papers agree that domestic violence is not solely a gendered issue and that both men and women can be perpetrators and victims. There is broad consensus on the need for a comprehensively evidence-driven approach to research, policy, and practice. The main point of contention lies in the policy and funding implications of recognising gender symmetry. Feminist-informed authors (e.g., Abrams, 2016) caution that this could undermine support for women, while others (e.g., Straus (2014), Buttell & Starr (2012)) argue that failing to address female perpetration perpetuates the problem and hinders effective prevention.

There are a number of limitations which need to be addressed in this report which include time constraints, funding and the narrow review of literature. This report was constructed by a self-funded consult and did not undergo a peer review process which may have added to its value. In future reports of this nature would benefit from a voluntary peer review process which can evaluate the conclusions of this report. Additionally, an extensive literature review is needed which examines both sides of the argument looking at the rigor of the research which is used and where one-sided research falls short.

### **Conclusion**

In the early twentieth century judges wanted men to know that bad behaviour in the home would not be accepted anymore (Katz, 2014). However, what became obvious was that women were not alone in experiencing abuse in the home, yet men were not afforded the same judicial response. Men experiencing domestic abuse have long been overlooked, with society continuing to apply a double standard. Men are encouraged to talk openly about their emotions and fears but are rarely believed when it comes to domestic violence. True progress in the domestic violence agenda can only be achieved when we set aside gendered assumptions and seek the evidence. The evidence is clear: domestic violence is not a one-way street. It's about power and control not simply gender. Men and

women can both be victims and perpetrators, which often goes unaddressed because of gendered assumptions. The dominate gendered domestic violence model fails to capture this complexity and, in doing so, fails many who need help. To drive real change, we must embrace a gender-blind, evidence-based approach that recognises all victims, removes stigma, and ensures legal, and support systems are based on evidence. Only by focusing on the real power dynamics at play rather than stereotypes, can we reduce the problem of domestic violence and improve safety in the home.

*"For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open"*  
Mark 4:22

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