

# Why don't men's rights activists fight for men's rights?

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It's time for male activists to stop resenting women and instead focus on issues that can actually help their fellow men. (Pic: iStock)

But when their activism is only discussing men's rights and masculinity in reference to feminism or violence against women, it's not acting for men, it's acting against women.

And men are in desperate need of help, so why are they being let down by the advocates who are supposed to be acting on their behalf?

MRA websites, and the comments sections on almost every article about violence against women, are full of [men angrily disputing the irrefutable data](#) on the disproportionate number of female victims in domestic violence. This is not activism centred on establishing services for issues that affect men, this is resentment that people believe women when they talk about the violence they've suffered at the hands of men, and anger that women are given the assistance they need to escape it.

It's an odd focus, given that domestic and sexual violence are almost the only high-risk areas in which men are under-represented as victims. Almost every other life threatening social issue puts men at much greater risk than women.

Men are four times more likely to suicide than women, [more than 2000](#) men killed themselves in Australia in 2014. This is an appalling tragedy. Men are more likely to be [murdered](#) and [assaulted](#) than women, twice as likely to die from [cancer](#) and [drug overdoses](#), and three times more likely to die in [car accidents](#). A staggering [92 per cent](#) of the more than 36,000 people in Australian prisons are men. Men are twice as likely to suffer from problem [gambling addictions](#), and significantly more likely to [suffer substance abuse](#) than women.

These are shocking statistics, proving a clearly gendered and systemic problem with terrible consequences for men,

and they get very little attention.

If MRAs were truly advocating for these men, they would be rolling out opinion pieces and news reports and interviews with grassroots activists, talking about the causes and effects of these problems. We'd see demands for government inquiries and substantial funding for research to find solutions. Men who were truly being activists for men would, as women have for decades, be giving up careers and time to start volunteer-run refuges for the thousands of men at risk from these problems.

But it's not the MRAs who do this. One of the only grassroots services for men, Australian Men's Shed Association, mensshed.org, is a small but laudable and highly effective project. It provides a community, reduces isolation, and gives men a space to talk and find comfort and support when they need it. And nothing on the Men's Shed website or programs talks about women, it focuses only on issues of men's health and wellbeing.

Perhaps this is why it is so effective.

A [report by Rural Health](#) found that Men's shed participants are "principally older, English speaking, retired men, with little post-secondary school education". The Men's Shed model is unarguably successful in saving lives and [improving health](#) for the men who participate, so it makes sense that extending it to reach boys and young men could be equally effective. Why isn't this at the top of the agenda for MRAs? When so many men are dying unnecessarily, and are so disproportionately imprisoned or suffering from addictions, surely MRAs genuinely interested in men's wellbeing would want to at least explore one of the few options that appears to make genuine change. But sites like mensrights.com.au don't even mention it.

It's difficult to avoid the conclusion that the reason this activism doesn't exist is that MRAs are not acting for men, they are acting against women.



There are clearly gendered and systemic problems with terrible consequences facing men, but these issues get little attention. (Pic: iStock)

Take for example, the NSW government recent announcement that it will be spending [\\$13 million dollars](#) on a ground breaking approach to providing services for male victims of domestic violence over the next four years.

This is a great initiative, no one should ever have to suffer domestic violence, but if they do, they certainly shouldn't have to do so unsupported. Men's Right's Activists have been vocal in their advocacy for male victims of domestic violence and there is no doubt that this funding is in response to their activism.

It's troubling though, that this rare success in providing services for men seems, in large part, to be driven by anger that most services for domestic violence are directed at women. It's both sad and incomprehensible that men's right's activism is strongest in the only space where women are more at risk, and ignores the areas of genuine and significant danger for men.

The MRA activism against women isn't new, it's dogged the entire history of the men's right's movement, which started in response to the beginnings of women's liberation. One of the earliest records of MRA writing comes from an article in Putnam's in 1856, in which the writer bemoaned the changes women were making to American society that meant "the husband cannot lay a finger on his wife by way of chastisement, except at the risk of being complained of for assault and battery, and perhaps, sued for divorce, and (which is worse than either) of being pronounced by his neighbours as a brutal fellow".

In 1908, Ernest Belfort Bax, sometimes referred to as the father of the men's movement, wrote *The Legal Subjugation of Men*, a furious response to the changes to criminal and civil laws in England after the suffragette movement. He advocated for "the abolition of modern female privilege" and raged against "the malice of persons, always women, who practically get up the [rape] cases or provoke them", describing one 14-year-old girl who went to police to report that her father's sexual abuse of her and her 11-year-old sister as "one of the most virulent little minxes I ever saw".

This rhetoric of women fabricating claims of rape and domestic violence, and fury that men are required to contribute to the financial support of their children, is still the basis of modern men's rights movements.

It's sad that so little has changed for them in so long, but much sadder for all of us that they are failing so terribly to help the men they claim to represent.

Originally published as [Men's rights activists are getting it so wrong](#)