ALWAYS BEATING UP ON MEN

The domestic violence industry has a vested interest in a gendered analysis

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Eva Solberg is a Swedish politician, a proud feminist who holds an important post as chairwoman of the party Moderate Women. Last year she was presented with her government's latest strategy for combating domestic violence. Like similar reports across the world, this strategy assumes the only way to tackle domestic violence is through teaching misogynist men (and boys) to behave themselves.

The Swedish politician spat the dummy. Writing on the news site Nyheter24, Solberg took issue with her government's "tired gendered analysis", which argued that eradicating sexism was the solution to the problem of domestic violence. She explained her reasoning: "We know through extensive practice and experience that attempts to solve the issue through this kind of analysis have failed. And they failed precisely because violence is not and never has

been a gender issue. Solberg challenged the government report's assumption that there was a guilty sex and an innocent one. "Thanks to extensive research in the field, both at the national and international level, we now know with great certainty that this breakdown by sex is simply not true."

She made reference to the world's largest research database on intimate partner violence, the Partner Abuse State of Knowledge project, which summarises more than 1700 scientific papers on the topic.

She concluded that her government's report was based on misinformation about family violence and that, contrary to the report's one-sided view of men as the only perpetrators, many children were experiencing a very different reality: "We must recognise the fact that domestic violence, in at least half of its occurrence, is carried out

by female perpetrators." One of the key patterns that



The University of Queensland's Kim Halford suggests that perhaps three-quarters of a million children witness both parents engaged in domestic violence

This type of omission is everywhere today, with most of our bureaucracies downplaying statistics that demonstrate the role of women in family violence and beating up evidence of male aggression

lv true.

towards a partner.

about these deaths

Survey, clearly demonstrates

gest there's an epidemic of dom-

estic violence in this country.

"Many of the quoted statistics

around domestic violence are

exaggerated or incorrect," says

Llovd. "Contrary to popular belief

and commentary, rates of intimate

partner violence are not increas-

ing." He adds that while he under-

tion is no basis for public policy".

media so often publishes misinfor-

mation — such as a recent edi-

torial in *The Age* that repeated the

falsehood that domestic violence

was the leading cause of death or

illness for adult women in Victoria.

article "Silent victims" last year

(http://bit.ly/29CV5zD), it doesn't

even make the list of the top 10

such causes. The Age ignored

Lloyd's efforts to correct its mis-

take, ditto his concern about er-

notoriously unreliable source.

As I explained in my Inquirer

He, too, says it's wrong to sug-

domestic violence is decreasing.

spending on domestic violence.

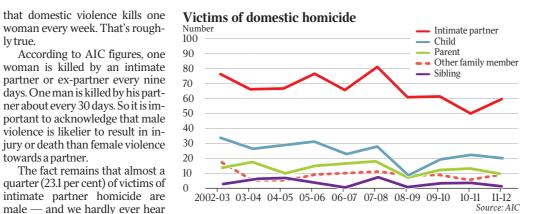
Domestic Violence study.

the same study.

How often have we been told we face an epidemic of domestic violence? It's simply not true. Most Australian women are lucky enough to live in a peaceful society where the men in their lives treat them well.

The official data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows violence against women has decreased across the 20-year period it has been studied, with the proportion of adult women experiencing physical violence from their male partner in the preceding year down from 2.6 per cent in 1996 to 0.8 per cent in 2012. (Violence from ex-partners dropped from 3.3 per cent to 0.7 per cent.)

'There's no evidence that we're in the middle of an epidemic of domestic violence," says Don Weatherburn, the respected director of the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, confirming that these figures from national surveys carried out by the ABS provide the best data on domestic



It is not serving our society well ness of DV, encouraging women to downplay the fact female violto report, and efforts to get the ence can also be lethal, towards police to respond properly," he men and towards children: women points out.

Weatherburn believes that the account for more than half of all murders of children (52 per cent). slight (5.7 per cent) increase in re-These are all still alarming statports of domestic assault in NSW during the past 10 years could be istics but here, too, there is good news. Domestic homicides are dedue to an increase in victims' willcreasing. The number of victims of ingness to report domestic assault; intimate partner homicide drophe points to the 11 per cent drop ped by almost a third (28 per cent) across that time in serious forms of

of domestic violence laws which fail to require the normal standards of proof and presumptions of innocence," Zimmermann says, adding that he's not talking about genuine cases of violent men who seriously abuse their wives and children but "law-abiding people who have lost their parental and property rights without the most basic requirements of the rule of

law

became an ambassador for Our 2002 found that women were like-Watch, she was welcomed by its lier than men to report acts such as pushing, slapping or throwing chief executive, Mary Barry, who something at their partner. Archer thanked the ambassadors for "engaging Australians to call out dispointed out that women were likerespect and violence towards lier to be injured as a result of the women and advocating for gender couple violence, although there was still a substantial minority of equality", which was "exactly what the evidence says is needed to end injured male victims. the epidemic"

Our Watch staff spend their time writing policy documents and running conferences all firmly locked into the gender equity framework. The site's facts-andfigures pages include lists of cherry-picked statistics about violence against women but male victims are dismissed by simply stating that the "overwhelming majority of acts of domestic violence are perpetrated by men against women".

There's an interesting parallel work with young people was part of the world-renowned Dunedin here. As it happens, this one-inthree ratio is similar to the proporlongitudinal study back in the tions of suicides among men and 1990s that recently featured on the women. Among males, 2.8 per cent SBS series Predict My Future of all deaths in 2014 were attribut-(http://bit.ly/29NEDwQ).

portant reason to make couple violence a significant focus. Naturally, none of this rates a mention in the section on "what

ous injury," he says. Of course, the

impact on children is the other im-

drives violence against women" in the official government framework (http://bit.ly/2a3sVOQ) promoted by all our key domestic violence bodies. Nor is there any proper attention paid to other proven, evidence-based risk factors such as alcohol and drug abuse, poverty and mental illness.

The only officially sanctioned risk factor for domestic violence in this country is gender inequality. "Other factors interact with or reinforce gender inequality to contribute to increased frequency and severity of violence against women, but do not drive violence in and of themselves" is the only grudging acknowledgment in the framework that other factors may be at play.

At the recent hearings of Victoria's Royal Commission into Family Violence, experts in alcohol abuse and mental illness spoke out about this blatant disregard of the 40 years of research that addresses these complexities. "It is simplistic and misleading to say that domestic violence is caused by patriarchal attitudes,' said James Ogloff, a world-renowned mental health expert.

"A sole focus on the gendered nature of family violence, which labels men as the perpetrators and women as the victims and which identifies gender inequity as the principal cause of family violence, is problematic on a number of levels," said Peter Miller, principal research fellow and co-director of the violence prevention group at Deakin University.

Miller was involved in a com-This two-way violence wasn't prehensive recent review of longiwhat most researchers expected to tudinal studies involving prefind, admits a leading researcher in dictors of family violence that identified childhood experiences this area, Terrie Moffitt from Duke University in the US. "We asked with abuse and violence, particularly in families with problem the girls questions like, 'Have you hit your partner?' 'Have you alcohol use, as key predictors of adult involvement in domestic thrown your partner across the room?' 'Have you used a knife on violence. He has encountered obyour partner?' I thought we were struction in conducting and pubwasting our time asking these lishing research into the role of drugs and alcohol in family questions but they said yes, and they said yes in just the same numviolence. bers as the boys did." Moffitt's The evidence is there about the

complexities of domestic violence, but on an official level no one is listening. The reason is simple. The deliberate distortion of this important social issue is all about feminists refusing to give up hard-

won turf. Ogloff spelled this out to

the royal commission when he ex-

plained that the Victorian family

violence sector feared that "recog-

nising other potential causes of vi-

olence could cause a shift in

funding away from programs di-

Forty years ago an important

rected at gender inequity".

emerged from PASK, Solberg said, was that violence in the family was an inherited problem and children learned from watching the violence of both their parents. "To know this and then continue to ignore the damage done to the children who are today subjected to violence is a huge social betraval," she concluded. "The road to a solution for this social problem is hardly to stubbornly continue to feed the patient with more of the same medicine that has already been tried for decades.'

There's a certain irony that this happened in Sweden, the utopia for gender equality and the last place you would expect misogyny to be blamed for a major social evil. But despite Scandinavian countries being world leaders in gender equality (as shown by the 2014 World Economic Forum's global gender gap index), Nordic women experience the worst physical or sexual violence in the EU. Given this inconvenient truth it seems extraordinary that for decades the gendered analysis of domestic violence has retained its grip on Sweden — as it has in other Western countries, including Australia.

No one would deny that it was a great achievement to have men's violence against women fully acknowledged and to take critical steps to protect vulnerable women and ensure their safety.

But it has been shocking to watch this morph into a worldwide domestic violence industry determined to ignore evidence showing the complexities of violence in the home and avoid prevention strategies that would tackle the real risk factors underpinning this vital social issue.

Here, too, we are witnessing Solberg's "huge social betrayal" by denying the reality of the violence being witnessed by many Australian children.

Just look at the bizarre \$30 million television campaign the federal government ran a few months ago, which started with a little boy slamming a door in a little girl's face. A series of vignettes followed, all about innocent females cowering from nasty males.

The whole thing is based on the erroneous notion that domestic violence is caused by disrespect for women, precisely the type of "tired gender analysis" that Solberg has so thoroughly discredited.

Yet our government spent at least \$700,000 in funding for research and production of this cam-

violence in the country. He adds that in NSW "serious forms of domestic assault, such as assault inflicting grievous bodily harm, have actually come down by 11 per cent over the last 10 years".

The most recent statistics from the ABS Personal Safety Survey show 1.06 per cent of women are physically assaulted by their partner or ex-partner each year in Australia. This figure is derived from the 2012 PSS and published in its Horizons report by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, available at http://bit.ly/IZYSyEj. The rate is obtained by dividing cell B9 in Table 19 (93,400) by the total female residential population

aged 18 and older (8,735,400). One in 100 women experiencing this physical violence from their partners is obviously a matter of great concern. But this percentage is very different from the usual figures being trotted out. You'll never find the figure of 1.06 per cent mentioned by any of the domestic violence organisations in this country. Their goal is to fuel the flames, to promote an alarmist reaction with the hope of attracting ever greater funding for the cause.

What we hear from them is that one in three women are victims of violence. But that's utterly misleading because it doesn't just refer to domestic violence. These statistics are also taken from the Personal Safety Survey but refer to the proportion of adult women who have experienced any type of physical violence at all (or threat of violence.) So we're not just talking about violence by a partner or violence in the home but any aggressive incident, even involving a perfect stranger — such as an altercation with an aggressive shopping trolley driver or an incident of

road rage That's partly how the figure inflates to one in three, but it also doesn't even refer to what's happening now because these figures include lifetime incidents for adult women - so with our 70-yearolds the violence could have taken place more than 50 years ago. And the equivalent figure for men is worse—one in two.

As for the most horrific crimes. where domestic violence ends in homicide, we are constantly told

between 1989-90 and 2010-12, acdomestic assault, such as assault cording to data supplied by the inflicting grievous bodily harm, as AIC (http://bit.ly/2bxn1GO). a more reliable picture of the trend Chris Lloyd is one of a growing in domestic violence.

Weatherburn adds that valid number of Australian academics comparisons of state police figures concerned at the misrepresentation of domestic violence staton assault are impossible because istics in this country. An expert in each police force has a different statistics and data management at approach to recording assault. But the Melbourne Business School, in many states the goalposts have Lloyd confirms our best source of also shifted. data, the ABS's Personal Safety

The explosion in police records is due in part to recent expansions in the definition of family violence to include not just physical abuse but also threats of violence, psychological, emotional, economic and social abuse. Look at Western Australia, where this changed definition was introduced in 2004. That year West Australian police recorded 17,000 incidents of violence, but by 2012 this had almost tripled to 45,000.

stands the emotional reaction Other states report similar trends because of these expanded people have to this crime, "emodefinitions. He's concerned that Australian

"If a woman turns up to a police station claiming her man has velled at her, the chances are that she'll end up with a police report and well on her way to obtaining an apprehended violence order, which puts her in a very powerful position," says Augusto Zimmermann, a commissioner with the Law Reform Commission of Western Australia, who explains that AVOs can be used to force men to leave their homes and deny them contact with their children.

roneous media reports that Often men are caught in police inflated domestic violence figures proceedings and evicted from by using police crime statistics — a their homes by orders that are issued without any evidence of legal As Weatherburn points out, it's wrongdoing. "It is a frightening revery difficult to determine whethality that here in Australia a perer swelling numbers of incidents fectly innocent citizen stands to reported to police reflects an inlose his home, his family, his repucrease in actual crime. "It may simtation, as a result of unfounded allegations. This is happening to ply be a tribute to the excellent job that has been done to raise awaremen every day (as a consequence)

The growing trend for AVOs to be used for tactical purposes in family law disputes is also pushing up police records of domestic violence, "Rather than being motivated by legitimate concerns about feeling safe, a woman can make an application to AVO simply because she was advised by lawyers to look for any reason to apply for such an order when facing a family law dispute," says Zimmermann, who served on a recent govern-

ment inquiry into legal issues and

domestic violence.

How often have we been told we face an epidemic of domestic violence? It's simply not true

A survey of NSW magistrates found 90 per cent agreed that AVOs were being used as a divorce tactic. Research by family law professor Patrick Parkinson and colleagues from the University of Sydney revealed that lawyers were suggesting that clients obtain AVOs, explaining to them that verbal and emotional abuse were enough to do the trick

The bottom line is that police reports tell us little and the ABS Personal Safety Survey remains our best source of data, showing the true picture of domestic violence. But there's one more vital fact revealed by that survey that rarely surfaces: men account for one in three victims of partner violence.

You'll never find this figure mentioned on Our Watch, one of our leading domestic violence organisations, annually attracting

ed to suicide, while the rate for females was 0.9 per cent. Imagine the public outcry if the smaller number of female suicides were used to justify committing the entire suicide prevention budget to men. So why is it that all our government organisations are getting away with doing just that with the hundreds of millions being spent on domestic violence?

leading experts on couple relationships, Kim Halford, a professor of clinical psychology at the University of Queensland, most family violence does not fit the picture most of us have when we imagine domestic violence - a violent man severely beating up his partner to control her. Such violence makes up less than 1 per cent of family violence.

way aggression, with international research showing about a third of couples have a go at each other pushing, slapping, shoving or worse. Given the shame and stigma associated with being a male victim of family violence it is not surprising that men downplay these experiences in victim survevs such as Australia's Personal Safety Survey. It's only when men and women are asked about perpetrating violence that the twoway violence emerges, with women readily admitting to researchers that they are very actively involved and often instigate

"Thirty years of international research consistently shows that women and men are violent towards each other at about the same rate," Halford tells Inquirer. As one example, two major meta-analysis studies conducted by psychology professor John Archer from Britain's University of Central Lancashire in 2000 and

It is telling that Australia has not conducted any of the largescale surveys focusing on perpetrating violence likely to reveal the two-way pattern shown elsewhere. But gender symmetry did emerge in violence studies published in 2010-11 by Halford that focused on couples at the start of their relationships, newlywed couples and couples expecting a child together. Even with these early relationships, about a guarter of the

> ent towards their partners — just as many as the men. Halford suggests that perhaps three-quarters of a million children every year in Australia are witnessing both parents engaged in domestic violence. Only small numbers see the severe violence we hear so much about, what the feminists call "intimate terrorism". where a perpetrator uses violence in combination with a variety of other coercive tactics to take control over their partner, but as Hal-

children were witnessing this two-

way parental couple violence, with

14.4 per cent witnessing "couple vi-

olence",9per cent witnessing male

to female violence only and 7.8 per

cent witnessing female to male vi-

olence only - which means about

one in four young Australians

have this detrimental start to their

lives. The report found the most

damage to children occurred

when they witnessed both parents

hit only in self-defence, but Hal-

ford points out the evidence shows

this is not true. "In fact, one of the

strongest risk factors for a woman

being hit by a male partner is her

It is often claimed that women

involved in violence.

ford points out, even less severe couple violence is not trivial. "Children witnessing any form of family violence, including couple violence, suffer high rates of mental health problems and the children are more likely to be violent themselves. Couple violence is also a very strong predictor of relationship break-up, which has profound effects on adults and their children," he says.

The 2001 Young People and Domestic Violence study mencow supporting legions of bureautioned earlier was based on nacrats and policymakers." tional research involving 5000 young Australians aged 12 to 20. This found ample evidence that

der inequality view of violence, suggesting tackling violence in the home required dealing with the real roots of violence, such as intergenerational exposure to male and female aggression.

News travelled fast. By the time Pizzey was set to leave for the Australian leg of the trip she was persona non grata with the feminists running our refuges. Her visit to

That was 1976. Since then the gendered view of domestic violence has held sway, dissenters are silenced and evidence about the true issues underlying this complex issue is ignored. And the huge cash cow supporting our blinkered domestic violence industry becomes ever more bloated.

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The 'Stop it at the start' campaign was based on the notion that domestic violence is caused by disrespect for women

According to one of Australia's

Most family violence is two-

this type of "couple violence".





feminist figure was invited to Australia to visit our newly established women's refuges. Erin Pizzey was the founder of Britain's first refuge, women admit they have been viola woman praised around the world for her pioneering work helping women escape from violence. On the way to Australia Pizzev travelled to New Zealand, where she spoke out about her changing

views. She had learned through dealing with violent women in her refuge that violence was not a gender issue and that it was important to tackle the complexities of violence to properly address the issue.

Pizzey quickly attracted the wrath of the women's movement in Britain, attracting death threats that forced her for a time to leave the country. She tells Inquirer from London: "The feminists seized upon domestic violence as the cause they needed to attract more money and supporters at a time when the first flush of enthusiasm for their movement was starting to wane. Domestic violence was perfect for them — the just cause that no one dared challenge. It led to a worldwide million-dollar industry, a huge cash

In Pizzey's New Zealand press nterviews she challenged the gen-

this country was cancelled.



