# WHAT FACTORS SHAPE COMMUNITY ATTITUDES TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

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## INTRODUCTION

In February 2009, the Commonwealth Government commissioned VicHealth to conduct a national survey on Australian attitudes to violence against women. In addition to setting a benchmark against which changes in beliefs and values can be measured, the survey provides valuable information about the factors which shape attitudes to violence against women. This thematic review compares the survey findings with the latest literature in this area.

With Australian governments at all levels investing significant resources in primary prevention, it is timely to consider the processes that determine community attitudes. Recent initiatives that have received substantial government funding include respectful relationships education programs in schools and social marketing campaigns utilising the popular media, such as social networking web sites. In order to maximise the impact of these interventions, we need to know what factors affect community acceptance of violence and make sure they are effectively targeted.

## KEY TEXTS

This thematic review focuses on the findings of four recent publications that explore factors influencing attitudes to domestic violence (Australian Institute of Criminology [AIC], The Social Research Centre [SRC] & VicHealth 2009; Flood & Pease 2009; Uthman, Lawoko & Moradi 2009; Wendt 2009). All four texts focus on the beliefs and values of general community members, rather than professionals who work with people affected by domestic and family violence.

The four texts have been selected for this review as they represent some of the latest Australian and international literature in this area. While they discuss community attitudes in very different cultural

settings – ranging from the rural South Australia to sub-Sahara Africa – there are some striking similarities in their findings. Nonetheless, they represent only a small sample of the growing body of research on this topic and those interested should consult the section 'Further Reading' at the end of this review.

The impetus for the review was the release of the results of the *National Community Attitudes to Violence against Women Survey 2009* (AIC, SRC & VicHealth 2009). This survey is the most extensive national study on Australian attitudes to violence against women to be undertaken to date. It involved:

- telephone interviews with more than 10 000 people over the age of sixteen across Australia, with a minimum of 1000 people interviewed in each state and territory (the general community sample)
- 2500 telephone interviews with members of selected culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups; specifically first and second generation Australians from the Italian, Greek, Chinese, Vietnamese and Indian communities (the SCALD sample)
- 400 face to face interviews with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (the Indigenous sample).

The survey provides rich insights into the way people think about and respond to intimate partner abuse, as well as other forms of violence against women such as sexual harassment, sexual assault and stalking. Moreover, by comparing the results against those of a 1995 survey conducted by the Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women, the researchers were able to point to areas where attitudes have improved or deteriorated over time (see text box: 'Australian attitudes to violence against women: have they improved?').

A key focus of the survey was to identify what factors shape community attitudes to violence against women. Using statistical modelling, the researchers found that being male and having low levels of support for gender equity or equality were the strongest predictors for holding violence-supportive attitudes (AIC, SRC & VicHealth 2009, p. 54). They also found some differences in attitudes based on age, socio-economic background, geographic location, and migration and settlement factors.

Taking up this theme, this review considers the findings of the national survey against those of three recent journal articles. The first, a literature review by Flood and Pease (2009), touches on a wide range of factors that influence community attitudes, in particular highlighting the influence of gender and culture as meta-factors which shape beliefs at the level of the individual, organisation, community and society.

The second article, by Uthman, Lawoko and Moradi (2009), takes us to sub-Sahara Africa, with a comparative analysis of factors influencing attitudes to intimate partner violence in seventeen countries. Their study compared the data from each country's most recent Demographic and Health Survey. Conducted with funding from the United States (US) Agency for International Development, these surveys involve representative cross-sectional samples of around 5000 to 15 000 households. The study findings make for a fascinating counterpoint to the Australian national survey.

Finally, Wendt's (2009) qualitative study takes a different approach altogether, honing in on the factors that shape attitudes to domestic violence within a single community. Based in the Barossa Valley region of South Australia, her research consisted of interviews with eighteen key community informants, twelve human service workers and twenty-one women who had experienced domestic violence, all of whom had lived locally for at least five years.

## Australian attitudes to violence against women: have they improved?

One of the major objectives of the *National Community Attitudes to Violence against Women Survey 2009* was to determine whether Australian attitudes to violence against women had improved since 1995, when the Office for Women conducted a similar survey. While the overall trend in community attitudes to violence against women is encouraging, the researchers found that certain myths about violence have endured and, in some cases, become more prevalent (AIC, SRC & VicHealth 2009, p. 9).

Some positive changes in attitudes since 1995 include:

- there is greater recognition of the range of acts which constitute domestic violence, in particular psychological, verbal and economic abuse (pp. 24-25)
- almost all people agree that domestic violence is a crime (p. 31)
- most people say that they are willing to intervene in domestic violence situations, especially those involving a friend or family member (p. 50).

The key areas where attitudes to violence against women remain problematic include:

- few people understand the reasons why women stay in violent relationships (p. 48)
- a large number of people believe that women often make false allegations of violence (p. 44)
- attitudes which justify, excuse and minimise violence against women remain persistent (p. 37)
- the belief that domestic violence is perpetrated equally by men and women has become more widespread (p. 34).

## THEMES ACROSS KEY TEXTS

Although they adopt different approaches to the topic and draw on diverse contexts, the four key texts share a number of common themes. First, all authors agree that understanding attitudes to domestic violence should be a central concern of policymakers and researchers alike. Second, there is a strong consensus across the key texts, and supported in the wider literature, that there is a close link between gender and attitudes to violence against women. That said, they also highlight a wide range of other factors which shape community attitudes, such as socio-economic status, race and ethnicity, age and religion. Finally, the four key texts are all concerned with how an understanding of the factors which determine community attitudes can be translated into practical efforts to prevent violence against women.

### Why attitudes matter

A key premise of the four key texts is that understanding attitudes to violence against women matters. The authors highlight the importance of attitudes from both a policy and research perspective.

At a policy level, community attitudes are important as they affect the prevalence and impact of domestic violence. Attitudes are linked to the perpetration of violence, with those holding violence-supportive attitudes more likely to become offenders themselves (AIC, SRC & VicHealth 2009; Flood & Pease 2009). Attitudes also influence the responses of victims and the community to violence. They affect the ability of women to disclose violence and seek help; the decisions of bystanders to intervene; and the willingness of the community to hold men accountable (AIC, SRC & VicHealth 2009; Flood & Pease 2009; Wendt 2009). Finally, community attitudes may affect the implementation of policy and legislation. That is, professionals within the criminal justice, health, welfare and other service systems bring their own beliefs to their positions, reflecting those held in the wider community and in turn influencing their interpretation of policy and legislation. Indeed, system responses may differ markedly from stated policy if negative attitudes influencing individual workers' decisions are not addressed.

Researchers also acknowledge the need to understand attitudes to violence against women. Flood and Pease (2009) document the growing body of Australian and international literature on this subject. While much of this research has emerged from North America, Australia and to a lesser extent the United Kingdom (UK), their review also includes a number of studies from Asia and the Middle East. Meanwhile, Uthman, Lawoko and Moradi's (2009) study marks an important shift in research emerging out of the developing world. Where previous studies in low- and middle-income countries have typically focused on the prevalence of domestic

violence, their study is among the first attempts to measure the underlying attitudes towards it.

## Gender as the key predictor of attitudes

One of the main themes of this growing body of literature is that gender is closely linked to attitudes to violence against women. This theme emerges strongly from the four key texts in this thematic review, with the authors distinguishing between two different attributes of gender at play – on the one hand, one's individual gender or sex (whether one is male or female); and on the other hand, one's views on gender roles.

According to the *National Community Attitudes to Violence against Women Survey 2009*, sex is a major predictor of attitudes to violence against women (AIC, SRC & VicHealth 2009, p. 56). Men in the study identified a narrower spectrum of behaviours as domestic violence and were less likely to regard them as serious. They were more accepting of excuses for violence and less prepared to intervene in a domestic violence situation.

Even more important, however, is the community's views on gender equality and gender equity – the strongest predictor of attitudes, according to the survey (AIC, SRC & VicHealth 2009, p. 54). The survey included a set of general questions about women's status and access to resources in Australia, in order to determine each participant's gender equity score (i.e., their overall support for gender equity). The survey found that participants with a high score – around one third of the general community sample and slightly less in the SCALD sample – had a stronger understanding of the seriousness of domestic violence. They were also less likely to excuse or justify violence or to see it as a private matter.

The national survey's findings resonate with Flood and Pease's (2009) analysis of the wider literature in this area. They discuss the so-called 'gender gap' in attitudes to domestic violence, citing both Australian and international studies in which men and women were found to differ significantly in their beliefs and values (p. 127-128). These studies collectively show that men are more likely than women to:

- adhere to common myths about violence against women
- consider a smaller range of behaviours as violent
- express victim-blaming attitudes

- downplay the harm caused by violence and its seriousness.

According to Flood and Pease (2009), this 'gender gap' in attitudes has been documented in the US, as well as in Turkey, India, Japan, Kuwait and Hong Kong.

However, consistent with the findings of the national survey, Flood and Pease (2009) emphasise that being male or female is not itself the key predictor of attitudes to violence. Rather, they see the 'gender gap' as a reflection of attitudes towards gender roles and sexual norms more generally:

> *It is not sex per se, but gender orientation, that shape men's and women's contrasting understandings of violence against men… The most consistent predictor of attitudes supporting the use of violence against women is attitudes towards gender roles, that is, beliefs about appropriate roles for men and women.* (p. 128)

The findings of Uthman, Lawoko and Moradi (2009) again attest to the close relationship between gender and attitudes to violence against women. Their study found that sex was the most important predictor of attitudes, although in this case women – not men – were more likely to justify violence. Like others, Uthman, Lawoko and Moradi (2009) link this finding to the broader question of gender inequality. Significantly, the only country in which women were less likely to justify violence was Lesotho, where the adult female literacy rate is higher than the adult male literacy rate. A related finding of their study is that shared household decision-making between men and women was associated with lower tolerance for violence.

Where the other key texts use survey results to establish the link between gender and attitudes to domestic violence, Wendt's (2009) qualitative study uses discourse analysis to draw out the subtleties of this relationship. She identifies four dominant sets of discourse which influence attitudes to domestic violence in the Barossa community: the discourse of self-reliance, pride and privacy; the discourse of closeness, belonging and caring for each other; the discourse of family; and the discourse of Christianity. Wendt (2009) argues that rural culture is not homogenous and these discourses may be interpreted differently, sometimes facilitating and at other times hindering open discussion of domestic violence. We see this in the way that each discourse draws on particular gender norms to either legitimise or condemn domestic violence.

For example, according to Wendt (2009), the discourse of self-reliance, pride and privacy generated strength and independence within the Barossa community and for individual women.  Yet it also served to silence discussion around the issue of domestic violence by encouraging women and men to keep their problems private:

> *Accepting responsibility for abuse and asking for assistance did not fit the proud image of self-reliance, privacy, and forms of masculinity they had adopted that reinforced these cultural discourses.*  (p. 181)

Wendt's (2009) close analysis of the gender dynamics at work in the Barossa community adds depth to what is a consistent message across all four key texts: that gender is the key predictor of attitudes to domestic violence.

## Other factors

While gender is a powerful determinant of community attitudes to domestic violence and other forms of violence against women, the four key texts acknowledge that there are also other factors at play.  Flood and Pease (2009) are particularly thorough in their examination of a wide range of influences.  They present an explanatory framework of six clusters of factors which shape attitudes to violence (see Table 1).  The following discussion compares the evidence from the other studies against this framework.

**Table 1: A framework for understanding attitudes to violence against women (Flood & Pease 2009)**

| Cluster | Key factors |
|---|---|
| Gender | Gender and sexual norms |
| Culture | Socio-economic factors |
|  | Race and ethnicity |
| Individual factors | Experiencing or witnessing violence |
|  | Age and development |
| Organisational factors | Social relations, cultures and policies of formal organisations and institutions (e.g. sports groups, university residences, the military, religious institutions) |
| Community factors | Peer groups and informal social relations |
|  | Religion, spirituality and churches |
| Societal factors | Mass media (e.g. pornography, television and other popular media, news coverage, community education and social marketing campaigns) |
|  | Criminal justice policies and law reform |
|  | Social movements |

### *Culture*

In Flood and Pease's (2009, p. 127) framework, culture is defined broadly to include 'class, race, ethnicity and other forms of social difference'.  Like gender, they argue that culture shapes attitudes at all levels, from the individual through to the entire society.  Importantly, they stress that the relationship between culture and attitudes towards violence is 'dynamic':

> *One the one hand, there is evidence that people who move from a more violence-supportive cultural context to a less violence-supportive one can have their tolerance for violence lessened as a result... On the other hand, violence-supportive attitudes can be imported by immigrant communities from one culture context to another.*  (p. 130)

The findings of the *National Community Attitudes to Violence against Women Survey 2009* demonstrate the complexity of the relationship between culture and attitudes towards violence.  The survey found that socio-economic background had some – albeit inconsistent – influence on attitudes to violence against women.  In particular, both occupation and employment status were predictive of attitudes to economic abuse, with those in white collar jobs more likely to rate it as a serious form of violence, as were those not in full-time employment (p. 57).

Similarly, the survey found that there were some differences between the attitudes of the general community and the SCALD samples.   Moreover, there were variations within the SCALD sample, associated with different patterns of migration and settlement.  Four key factors stand out:

• *length of settlement:* those who arrived in Australia after 1980 were less likely to define some behaviours as 'always' domestic violence

• *place of birth:* those born outside of Australia were less likely to define some behaviours as domestic violence

• *cultural heritage:* Vietnamese and Chinese participants did not rank behaviours as seriously as Greek, Italian and Indian participants

- *language spoke at home:* respondents who spoke English at home were less likely to accept excuses for violence (p. 57).

Uthman, Lawoko & Moradi (2009) also raise the importance of culture, particularly socio-economic status. Their study found that improved attitudes to violence against women were linked to increasing wealth and educational attainment. In addition, they note that some of the disparities in attitudes across the countries may be explained by the diversity of sub-Sahara Africa, stressing that the region is made up of a range of different ethnicities, cultures and religions.

### Individual factors

Where gender and culture influence attitudes at all levels, Flood and Pease (2009) argue that there are some factors which affect beliefs and values specifically at the level of the individual, organisation, community or society. At the level of the individual, they pinpoint two factors which influence attitudes to violence against women. First, experiencing or witnessing violence as a child is generally linked to greater tolerance of violence in adulthood, although there are some studies indicating that it can also have the opposite effect and reduce tolerance. Second, attitudes change with age and the developmental process. Overall, older people (aged 55 and over) appear to be less well informed about violence against women. However, both Australian and international studies identify younger boys as a group of concern as well.

Age was also one of the predictors of attitudes identified in the Australian national survey, with younger people who participated (especially those aged 16-20) more likely to hold violence-supportive attitudes on some measures (p. 56). While they demonstrated a strong understanding of the criminal nature of domestic violence and support for community/police action, younger people were less likely to appreciate the complexities of violence against women (e.g. what acts constitute domestic violence and their seriousness, the gendered nature of violence and the barriers to women leaving).

Likewise, Uthman, Lawoko & Moradi (2009) found that younger people demonstrated poorer attitudes to intimate partner violence. In order to better understand the role of age, they call for a longitudinal study to track changes in people's attitudes over time.

### Organisational factors

Attitudes to violence against women are also connected with particular formal organisations and institutions. Researchers have documented the prevalence of violence-supportive attitudes in four organisation types in particular: sports groups, university residences, the military and religious institutions. According to Flood and Pease (2009, p. 133), 'norms of gender inequality and homosocial male bonding that foster and justify abuse' are common features across these organisations.

Wendt's (2009) discussion of the role of religious leaders in the Barossa Valley, a predominately Lutheran community, is pertinent. While some women in her study received support from the Church hierarchy, others found them unresponsive:

*Some people spoke about how Church leaders did not know how to address domestic violence, were reluctant to talk about it, and were afraid to acknowledge it.* (p. 182)

Despite receiving poor responses, Wendt (2009, p. 182) notes that many women continued to defend the Church, believing that pastors 'had acted with the best intentions'. This example illustrates just how difficult it can be to challenge institutional cultures.

### Community factors

Beyond formal organisations, there are also broader community level factors that impact on attitudes to violence against women. Flood and Pease (2009) specifically highlight the role of peer groups and social networks in shaping young men's views, and the role of religion across the community.

Again, Wendt's (2009) work makes for a useful comparison. In addition to identifying the ambivalent responses of church leaders to domestic violence, she points to the influence of Christianity on attitudes across the Barossa community. For example, she describes how women's decisions to stay in violent relationships were affected by their Christian belief in marriage as 'sacred, eternal and uniting' (p. 182), and relates instances of men using theology to legitimise their authority over their wives.

While Wendt's (2009) study highlights the potential for religion to be used to legitimise violence, this need not always be the case. Flood and Pease (2009, p. 134) note that the theological values of 'compassion, justice, and liberation' can also be used to challenge violence against women, once again highlighting the complexities of attitudinal formation.

## Societal factors

Finally, Flood and Pease (2009) point to a number of factors which affect attitudes to violence against women across society. The first, mass media, is a potent source of influence, with the viewing of pornography and electronic games in particular linked to the development of violence-supportive attitudes. Other forms of media (such as news coverage and advertising) have a more mixed effect, in some cases promoting greater awareness of domestic violence and in other cases perpetuating myths and reducing empathy for victims. Interestingly, Uthman, Lawoko and Moradi (2009) found that improved attitudes to violence against women were linked to access to newspapers, while the impact of having access to other forms of media (such as television and radio) was uneven. They argue that access to modern media improves attitudes overall by 'exposing [people] to non-conformist ideas'.

Unlike mass media, the impact of criminal justice policies and law reform on attitudes to violence against women – the second societal factor identified by Flood and Pease (2009) – is less well evaluated. However, they speculate that attitudes may depend, in part, on how appropriately the criminal justice system responds to domestic violence.

Finally, social movements are an important source of social and attitudinal change (Flood and Pease 2009). However, in the case of violence against women, such movements may work in both directions: on the one hand, feminist and pro-feminist groups have sought to raise awareness of the prevalence and impact of domestic violence; on the other hand, anti-feminist men's rights and fathers' rights groups and conservative religious groups have sought to minimise its significance.

One societal factor not specifically mentioned by Flood and Pease (2009) is urbanisation. All three of the other key texts raise this issue, although their conclusions differ somewhat on its significance. On the one hand, in the Australian national survey, respondents living in a capital city were less likely to say that they would intervene in a domestic violence situation, suggesting that they were more tolerant of violence than their regional counterparts (AIC, SRC & VicHealth 2009, p. 57). On the other hand, Uthman, Lawoko and Moradi (2009) found that for their sample, urbanisation is a factor associated with improved attitudes to violence against women. Bridging the gap between the two studies, Wendt (2009) stresses the importance of exploring the discourses that make up local cultures and cautions against treating rural communities as homogenous – a point one might apply equally to urban communities.

## Changing community attitudes to domestic violence

Understanding the factors which influence community attitudes to domestic violence is only the first step. The real challenge is to use this knowledge to develop effective community education and violence prevention strategies. Drawing on their understanding of the predictors of attitudes, the four key texts provide insight into where resources should be targeted as part of a wider effort to improve attitudes to violence against women.

Based on the findings of the National Community Attitudes to Violence against Women Survey 2009, the AIC, SRC and VicHealth (2009) conclude that there is a need for both universal efforts to promote attitudinal change and for targeted strategies for groups at higher risk of perpetrating or experiencing violence. With attitudes to gender the most powerful predictor of attitudes to violence against women, the report emphasises the importance of promoting greater respect between and acceptance of women and men as equals. As sex and age are also key predictors of attitudes, they emphasise the need to target men and boys, and young people. Strategies for CALD and Indigenous communities are also discussed.

Similar approaches are suggested by Uthman, Lawoko and Moradi (2009). Their main recommendations are around the need for gender based interventions, such as the promotion of joint household decision-making:

*Gender-based interventions, building on advocacy for shared autonomy in the domestic domain, and the provision of basal education for all may prove paramount in changing men's distorted attitudes about IPVAW [intimate partner violence against women], particularly among younger men and in rural settings. (pp. 12-13)*

More generally, they propose improving women's position through socio-economic development and higher education.

Rather than recommending specific interventions, Flood and Pease (2009) set out five broad principles that should guide efforts to change attitudes to violence against women. They argue that interventions must:

1. Be part of a broader project to change familial, organisational, communal and societal values that support violence against women

2. Tackle the gender and sexual norms in which attitudes to violence are embedded

3. Provide an alternative – that is, 'a set of norms and values centred on nonviolence and gender equality'

4. Be culturally appropriate

5. Be complemented by structural change.

Likewise, Wendt (2009) discusses some guiding principles for interventions, drawing our attention to the importance of community-based solutions. She implores researchers to learn about how the dynamics of local communities impact on attitudes and responses to domestic violence:

*It is imperative to learn about local cultures and dynamics from the community with respect, openness, and willingness. By including the community there is more opportunity to create alternative discourses that confront domestic violence. (p. 183)*

Together, the four key texts point to a need for a diversity of strategies and interventions aimed at improving attitudes to domestic violence.

## CONCLUSIONS

Our understanding of the factors that influence community attitudes to domestic violence has improved significantly in the past decade. The *National Community Attitudes to Violence against Women Survey 2009* is an especially valuable source of information for those working in this area in Australia, however there is also a growing body of international literature that speaks to this issue (see 'Further reading').

The message from the Australian national survey and from the other key texts in this thematic review is that attitudes to gender equality are the key predictor of attitudes to domestic violence. As such, it is critical that the domestic violence sector continues to pursue community education and violence prevention strategies that incorporate a gender perspective. The role of culture and of individual, organisational, community and societal factors also needs to be considered in targeting efforts to improve attitudes to domestic violence.

What is clear from all four key texts and from the wider literature is that attitudinal change is necessary in order to prevent and reduce domestic violence – and that it is a task that must be undertaken at all levels of society.

## FURTHER READING

### Australian surveys of community attitudes

**ANOP Research Services 1995,** *Community attitudes to violence against women: detailed report,* **Office for the Status of Women, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Canberra.** In 1995, the Office for the Status of Women commissioned this telephone survey of 2004 Australian adults. Like the 2009 survey, it found that gender was a key determinant of attitudes to violence against women, with women consistently better informed than men. Other factors identified in the survey included age, level of education, employment status, household income and country of birth.

**The Body Shop 2006,** *The Body Shop® Australia's survey of community attitudes, understandings and responses to abuse in relationships 2006: a summary of findings,* **The Body Shop Australia, Mulgrave, Vic.** Over 30 000 people (87% female, 13% male) participated in this Body Shop initiative. The survey involved a self-completed questionnaire, available in-store and online.

**National Crime Prevention 2001,** *Young people and domestic violence: national research on young people's attitudes and experiences of domestic violence,* **Crime Prevention Branch, Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, Canberra.** This survey of 5000 young people (aged 12-20 years) was administered in class, on the street and in public premises, enabling both school attendees and school leavers to participate.

**Partnerships Against Domestic Violence 2000,** *Attitudes to domestic and family violence in the diverse Australian community,* **Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.** Over 280 Australians from diverse backgrounds participated in focus groups, interviews and community meetings as part of this qualitative study. The sample included members of the general community; selected CALD groups (Vietnamese, Cantonese, Bosnian, Tagalog (Filipino), Turkish and Arabic); and the Indigenous community.

**Public Policy Research Centre & Office for the Status of Women 1988,** *Community attitudes towards domestic violence in Australia,* **Public Policy Research Centre, Sydney.** Telephone interviews with 1504 men and women were carried out for this 1987 national survey, the first of its kind in Australia. A key finding was that sexist attitudes are linked to pro-violence attitudes: participants who agreed that the man is the head of the household were also more likely to tolerate men's use of physical force.

**VicHealth 2006,** *Two steps forward, one step back: community attitudes to violence against women,* **Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Carlton South, Vic.** Telephone interviews with 2000 Victorians aged 18 years and over were conducted for this 2006 survey. An additional 800 participants from selected CALD backgrounds were interviewed. Like others, it found that being male and having low support for gender equality were the most consistent predictors of violence-supportive attitudes. To a lesser extent, place of birth, education level, occupation and employment status influenced respondents' attitudes.

## Overseas surveys

**Ford R 2009, 'Women should be hit for wearing sexy clothing in public, one in seven believe',** *The Times Online,* **9 March.** Viewed 19 November 2010, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/crime/article5875108.ece>. In March 2009, the UK Home Office released the findings of a survey on British attitudes to violence against women. The survey sample consisted of 1065 people over the age of eighteen. The report is not currently available, however The Times Online reported that the survey identified differences in attitudes linked to age and class.

**Nayak MB, Byrne CA, Martin MK & Abraham AG 2003, 'Attitudes toward violence against women: a cross-nation study',** *Sex Roles,* **vol. 49, nos. 7/8, pp. 333-342.** This study compared attitudes to violence against women among university students in India, Japan, Kuwait and the US. The sample sizes across the four countries differed slightly, ranging from 189 students in India to 407 in the US. The authors concluded that socio-cultural factors may have a stronger influence on attitudes than gender.

**Office on Violence Against Women 2007,** *Awareness and attitudes about domestic violence,* **Department of Justice, Washington, DC.** Viewed 19 November 2010, <http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/docs/polling_summary.pdf>. In 2006, the US Office on Violence Against Women conducted two focus groups and a telephone survey of 600 women. It found that women had a good understanding of issues related to domestic violence and its seriousness. However, one concerning finding was that a third of participants believed that victims held some responsibility for the violence.

**TNS Opinion & Social 2010,** *Domestic violence against women,* **Special Eurobarometer 344, TNS Opinion & Social, Belgium.** The European Commission's Directorate-General for Justice, Freedom and Security requested this Eurobarometer survey to measure how domestic violence is perceived by the European public. A total of 26 800 interviews were conducted across the twenty-seven European Union member countries. The report compares the results against a 1999 survey. It found that 86% of people consider domestic violence to be unacceptable and should be punishable by law, an increase from 63% in 1999.

## Factors affecting community attitudes

**Button DM 2008, 'Social disadvantage and family violence: neighborhood effects on attitudes about intimate partner violence and corporal punishment',** *American Journal of Criminal Justice,* **vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 130-147.** This US study investigated the link between social disadvantage and attitudes to family violence, using data from the 2006 Norfolk Residents' Attitudes about Crime Survey. Ten per cent of the sample indicated high approval for intimate partner violence. The two main factors that determined attitudes to intimate partner violence were race – white-identifying participants were more likely to approve of domestic violence than non-white participants – and approval of corporal punishment of children. Neighbourhood factors, such as rate of crime and perceived level of social disorder, were less significant predictors of attitudes to domestic violence.

**Flood M & Pease B 2006,** *The factors influencing community attitudes in relation to violence against women: a critical review of the literature*, **Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Carlton, Vic.** This extensive review of the Australian and international literature on factors affecting attitudes to violence against women was undertaken as part of VicHealth's Violence Against Women Community Attitudes Project. The authors adopt a social constructionist position, arguing that attitudes are contextual and depend upon circumstances. Flood and Pease's 2009 journal article, one of the key texts in this thematic review, is based on this report.

**Thapar-Björkert S & Morgan KJ 2010, '"But sometimes I think... they put themselves in the situation": exploring blame and responsibility in interpersonal violence',** *Violence Against Women*, **vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 32-59.** This qualitative study is based on interviews with fifteen volunteers at a local branch of the UK charity, Victim Support. Although the volunteers had received specialist training on domestic violence, the study found that they continued to struggle with the issue of victim blaming. The authors attribute the persistence of victim blaming attitudes to broader ideological discourses which legitimise domestic violence, especially beliefs about the 'natural' role of women. They also point to institutional factors which may unintentionally reinforce victim-blaming attitudes, such as 'personal safety' guides advising women to 'take care' which are given to Victim Support clients.

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