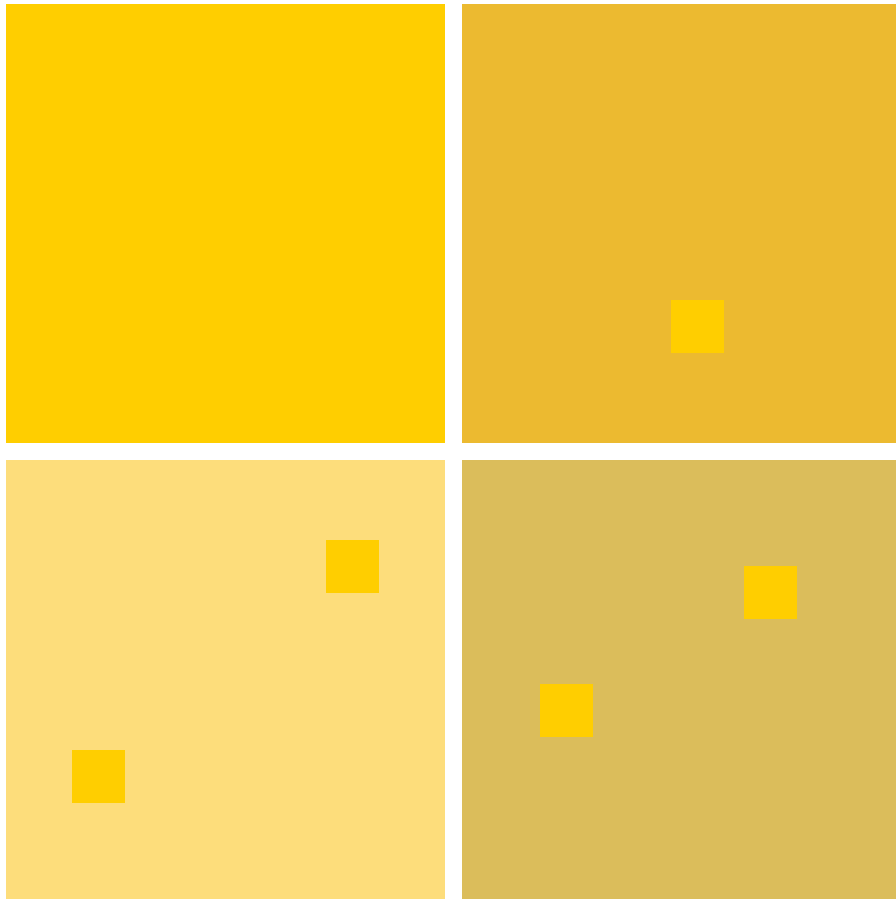


# ATTITUDES MATTER:



# SUMMARY NCAS

**THE 2021 NATIONAL COMMUNITY  
ATTITUDES TOWARDS VIOLENCE  
AGAINST WOMEN SURVEY (NCAS)**

## ANROWS acknowledgement

This material was produced with funding from the Australian Government. Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) gratefully acknowledges the financial and other support it has received from the Australian Government, without which this work would not have been possible. The findings and views reported in this paper are those of the authors and cannot be attributed to the Australian Government.

## Acknowledgement of Country

ANROWS acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land across Australia on which we live and work. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders past and present. We value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and knowledge. We are committed to standing and working with First Nations peoples, honouring the truths set out in the [Warawarni-gu Guma Statement](#).

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## Published by

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited (ANROWS)  
PO Box Q389, Queen Victoria Building, NSW 1230 | [www.anrows.org.au](http://www.anrows.org.au)

ABN 67 162 349 171

ISBN: 978-1-922645-71-5 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-922645-70-8 (PDF)

Please note that there is the potential for minor revisions of this report.  
Please check the online version at [www.anrows.org.au](http://www.anrows.org.au) for any amendments.



A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Australia

# Attitudes matter:



The 2021 National Community Attitudes towards  
Violence against Women Survey (NCAS)

**Summary for Australia**

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## Author acknowledgement

We thank our research partner, the Social Research Centre (SRC), led by Dr Nikki Honey. The researchers and statisticians at the SRC who contributed to the data collection and statistical analysis included Andrew Ward, Laura Rimginton, Sandra Ropero and Sebastian Misson.

We also thank the respondents who took the time to participate in the survey.

## Acknowledgement of lived experiences of violence

ANROWS acknowledges the lives and experiences of the people affected by domestic, family and sexual violence who are represented in this report. We recognise the individual stories of courage, hope and resilience that form the basis of ANROWS research.

Caution: Some people may find parts of this content confronting or distressing. Recommended support services include 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732), Lifeline (13 11 14) and, for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, 13YARN (13 92 76).

## About this summary

This report is a summary of the "main report" on the 2021 *National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey* (NCAS):

Coumarelos, C., Weeks, N., Bernstein, S., Roberts, N., Honey, N., Minter, K., & Carlisle, E. (2023). *Attitudes Matter: The 2021 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS), Findings for Australia* (Research report 02/2023). ANROWS.

This summary report is one among a suite of ANROWS resources being produced for the 2021 NCAS, all of which will be made available on the ANROWS website at [www.anrows.org.au/research-program/ncas/](http://www.anrows.org.au/research-program/ncas/).



This report addresses work covered in ANROWS's National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) Research Program. Please consult the [ANROWS website](http://www.anrows.org.au) for more information on this research program.

ANROWS research contributes to the shared vision to end gender-based violence in one generation of the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* (the National Plan 2022–2032) and the six National Outcomes of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (the National Plan 2010–2022). This research provides prevention and early intervention key indicators for the National Plan 2022–2032 and addresses National Outcome 1 – Communities are safe and free from violence, and National Outcome 2 – Relationships are respectful of the National Plan 2010–2022.

## Suggested citation

Coumarelos, C., Weeks, N., Bernstein, S., Roberts, N., Honey, N., Minter, K., & Carlisle, E. (2023). *Attitudes matter: The 2021 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS), Summary for Australia* (Research report, 03/2023). ANROWS.

# Contents

Figures	3
Tables	3
Shortened forms and data symbols	4
Key terms	5

## About the NCAS 10

### 1 Introduction: Violence against women and the need for action 11

1.1 Climate of violence against women	11
1.2 Facilitators of a climate of violence	13
1.3 Deconstructing the climate of violence: Prevention	15

### 2 Research design 17

2.1 Aims of the 2021 NCAS	17
2.2 2021 NCAS instrument	18
2.3 Sampling	18
2.4 Analysis and reporting	20

### 3 Findings: Benchmarking understanding and attitudes 21

3.1 Change in understanding and attitudes over time	23
3.2 Understanding and attitudes in 2021	25
3.3 Conclusion	26

### 4 Findings: Understanding of Violence against Women Scale (UVAWS) 27

4.1 UVAWS in focus: Recognise VAW Subscale	28
4.2 UVAWS in focus: Recognise DV Subscale	30
4.3 UVAWS in focus: Understand Gendered DV Subscale	30
4.4 Assessing the importance of demographics	32

### 5 Findings: Attitudes towards Gender Inequality Scale (AGIS) 33

5.1 AGIS in focus: Reinforce Gender Roles Subscale	36
5.2 AGIS in focus: Undermine Leadership Subscale	36
5.3 AGIS in focus: Limit Autonomy Subscale	38
5.4 AGIS in focus: Normalise Sexism Subscale	38
5.5 AGIS in focus: Deny Inequality Subscale	40
5.6 Assessing the importance of demographics and understanding	40

<b>6 Findings: Attitudes towards Violence against Women Scale (AVAWS)</b>	<b>41</b>
6.1 AVAWS in focus: Minimise Violence Subscale	44
6.2 AVAWS in focus: Mistrust Women Subscale	44
6.3 AVAWS in focus: Objectify Women Subscale	47
6.4 Assessing the importance of demographics, understanding and attitudes	50
<b>7 Findings: Specific types of violence against women</b>	<b>51</b>
7.1 Domestic violence	52
7.2 Sexual assault	52
7.3 Sexual harassment	52
7.4 Technology-facilitated abuse	53
7.5 Stalking	53
<b>8 Findings: Bystander response</b>	<b>54</b>
8.1 2021 NCAS bystander scenarios	55
8.2 Bystander response to each scenario	55
8.3 Anticipated peer support or criticism	56
8.4 Barriers to bystander intention to intervene	56
8.5 Assessing the importance of demographics, understanding and attitudes	57
<b>9 Findings: People and contexts</b>	<b>58</b>
9.1 Gender	64
9.2 Age	64
9.3 Sexuality	64
9.4 Disability	64
9.5 Country of birth and English proficiency	65
9.6 Formal education	65
9.7 Main labour activity	65
9.8 Socioeconomic status of area	65
9.9 Major cities, regional and remote areas	65
9.10 Gender composition of occupation and social contexts	65
<b>10 Implications of the NCAS findings for ending violence against women</b>	<b>66</b>
10.1 Benchmarking understanding and attitudes	68
10.2 Understanding of violence against women (UVAWS)	69
10.3 Attitudes towards gender inequality (AGIS)	70
10.4 Attitudes towards violence against women (AVAWS)	71
10.5 Types of violence against women	72
10.6 Bystander response	76
10.7 People and contexts	77
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>83</b>

# ■ Figures

<b>2-1:</b> Components of the NCAS instrument, 2021	19
<b>3-1:</b> Perception of violence against women as a problem, 2021	22
<b>3-2:</b> Understanding and rejection of gendered violence and inequality (GVIS scores) over time, 2009 to 2021	23
<b>3-3:</b> Understanding (UVAWS) and attitudes (AGIS, AVAWS) over time, 2009 to 2021	23
<b>3-4:</b> Understanding (TFAS) and attitudes (DVS, SVS, TFAS) regarding types of violence over time, 2009 to 2021	24
<b>3-5:</b> “Advanced” understanding of violence against women and rejection of problematic attitudes, 2021	25
<b>4-1:</b> Understanding of different aspects of violence against women (UVAWS and subscales) by gender, 2021	29
<b>4-2:</b> Recognising violence against women (UVAWS subscale items), 2021	30
<b>4-3:</b> Recognising domestic violence (UVAWS subscale items), 2021	31
<b>4-4:</b> Understanding the gendered nature of domestic violence perpetration (UVAWS subscale items), 2021	32
<b>4-5:</b> Understanding the gendered nature of domestic violence impacts (UVAWS subscale items), 2021	32
<b>5-1:</b> Rejection of different aspects of gender inequality (AGIS and subscales) by gender, 2021	35
<b>5-2:</b> Reinforcing rigid gender roles (AGIS subscale items), 2021	36
<b>5-3:</b> Undermining women’s leadership in public life (AGIS subscale items), 2021	37
<b>5-4:</b> Limiting women’s personal autonomy in relationships (AGIS subscale items), 2021	38
<b>5-5:</b> Normalising sexism (AGIS subscale items), 2021	39
<b>5-6:</b> Denying gender inequality experiences (AGIS subscale items), 2021	40
<b>6-1:</b> Rejection of different aspects of violence against women (AVAWS and subscales) by gender, 2021	43
<b>6-2:</b> Minimising violence against women and shifting blame (AVAWS subscale items), 2021	45
<b>6-3:</b> Mistrusting women’s reports of violence (AVAWS subscale items), 2021	46
<b>6-4:</b> Objectifying women and disregarding consent (AVAWS subscale items), 2021	48
<b>6-5:</b> Sexual consent scenario (AVAWS Objectify Women Subscale items), married couple variation, 2021	49
<b>6-6:</b> Sexual consent scenario (AVAWS Objectify Women Subscale items), acquaintance variation, 2021	49
<b>8-1:</b> Whether respondents would be bothered by scenario, 2021	56

# ■ Tables

<b>9-1:</b> Significant demographic predictors of understanding of violence against women (UVAWS), rejection of gender inequality (AGIS), rejection of violence against women (AVAWS), and likelihood of being bothered or intervening as a bystander (Scenarios B1, B2 and B3), 2021	60
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# Shortened forms and data symbols

## Shortened forms

<b>ABS</b>	Australian Bureau of Statistics	<b>National Plan 2022–2032</b>	<i>National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032</i>
<b>AGIS</b>	Attitudes towards Gender Inequality Scale	<b>NCAS</b>	National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey
<b>AIHW</b>	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	<b>N-MESC</b>	Non-main English-speaking country
<b>ANROWS</b>	Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety	<b>Recognise DV Subscale</b>	Recognise Domestic Violence Subscale
<b>AVAWS</b>	Attitudes towards Violence against Women Scale	<b>Recognise VAW Subscale</b>	Recognise Violence Against Women Subscale
<b>CDC</b>	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	<b>SAS</b>	Sexual Assault Scale
<b>Change the Story</b>	<i>Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia</i> (2nd ed.) (Our Watch, 2021)	<b>SHS</b>	Sexual Harassment Scale
<b>COAG</b>	Council of Australian Governments	<b>SVS</b>	Sexual Violence Scale
<b>DVS</b>	Domestic Violence Scale	<b>Technical report</b>	Coumarelos, C., Honey, N., Ward, A., Weeks, N., & Minter, K. (2023). <i>Attitudes matter: The 2021 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS), Technical report.</i> ANROWS.
<b>eSafety</b>	eSafety Commissioner	<b>TFAS</b>	Technology-Facilitated Abuse Scale
<b>GVIS</b>	Gendered Violence and Inequality Scale	<b>Understand Gendered DV Subscale</b>	Understand Gendered Domestic Violence Subscale
<b>LGBTQ+</b>	An evolving acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, asexual and other sexuality- or gender-diverse people	<b>UVAWS</b>	Understanding of Violence against Women Scale
<b>LOTE</b>	Language other than English	<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>MESC</b>	Main English-speaking country	<b>WGEA</b>	Workplace Gender Equality Agency
<b>National Plan 2010–2022</b>	<i>National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022</i>		



# Key terms

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<b>Attitudes</b>	Evaluations of a particular subject (e.g. person, object, concept) that usually exist along a continuum from less to more favourable. The NCAS measures attitudes towards violence against women, including attitudes towards specific types of violence such as domestic violence and sexual violence, as well as attitudes towards gender inequality.
<b>Backlash</b>	The resistance, hostility or aggression with which strategies to redress gender inequality or prevent violence are met by some people in the community (typically a minority).
<b>Benevolent and hostile sexism</b>	<b>Benevolent sexism</b> encompasses attitudes towards women that are seemingly positive but nonetheless imply women's inferiority to men based on perceptions of women as fragile, emotionally sensitive or needing help and protection. <b>Hostile sexism</b> encompasses overtly negative, resentful or misogynistic attitudes towards women who violate traditional gender roles and threaten male dominance. Both forms of sexism serve to justify and maintain the patriarchy and traditional gender roles (Glick & Fiske, 1997).
<b>Bystander</b>	Somebody who observes, but is not directly involved in, a harmful or potentially harmful event and could assist or intervene (Webster et al., 2018).
<b>Bystander response</b>	<p>How bystanders react to witnessing a scenario such as disrespect or abuse. The NCAS examined whether bystanders would be bothered by various scenarios and whether they would intervene.</p> <p><b>Prosocial bystander actions</b> attempt to improve the situation and can include confronting the perpetrator's unacceptable, gendered and violence-condoning attitudes and behaviour, as well as supporting the victim and survivor. In this report, the two prosocial responses examined were showing disapproval then and there or showing disapproval in private later.</p>
<b>Coercive control</b>	A pattern of behaviours used to manipulate, intimidate, isolate and control a partner and create an uneven power dynamic in the relationship (Council of Australian Governments [COAG], 2022; Meeting of Attorneys-General, 2022). Coercive control is often a significant part of a person's experience of domestic violence. A focus on coercive control reflects a shift from specific, isolated incidents (of primarily physical violence) to a recognition that individual acts can be used by perpetrators to form a broader pattern of abusive behaviours that reinforce and strengthen the control and dominance of one person over another (COAG, 2022).
<b>Domestic violence</b>	Refers to violence within current or past intimate partner relationships, which causes physical, sexual or psychological harm. Domestic violence can include physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and financial abuse, and often occurs as a pattern of behaviour involving coercive control. The term "domestic violence" is often used interchangeably with "intimate partner violence". "Domestic violence" is used in this report as many historical NCAS items use this terminology to describe violence between partners. (Note: Some broader definitions of domestic violence in the literature include violence between other family members.)

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<b>Emotional and psychological abuse</b>	Forms of abuse that may include verbal, non-verbal or physical acts by the perpetrator that are intended to exercise dominance, control or coercion over the victim; degrade the victim's emotional or cognitive abilities or sense of self-worth; or induce feelings of fear and intimidation in the victim (National Family and Domestic Violence Bench Book, 2022).
<b>Family violence</b>	A broader term than "domestic violence". Refers not only to violence between intimate partners but also to violence between family members. For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, "family violence" encapsulates the broader issue of violence within extended families, kinship networks and community relationships, as well as intergenerational issues. "Family" may also refer to "chosen families", as found in LGBTQ+ communities.
<b>Gender</b>	The socially constructed and learned roles, norms, behaviours, activities and attributes that a society considers appropriate for people, usually based on their biological sex. Gender has historically been constructed as a binary between "man" and "woman" or "masculinity" and "femininity", and as a hierarchy of "men" over "women". These binaries and hierarchies can produce inequalities and discrimination based on gender. As a social construct, gender is not fixed: the acceptable roles and behaviours associated with "man" and "woman" can vary from society to society and can change over time. Gender identities of "man" and "woman" are often associated with the social expectations for members of the biological sex categories "male" and "female". Where people identify their gender as matching their biological sex assigned or presumed for them at birth, this is called "cisgender". However, many people do not subscribe to cisgender norms and describe their gender identity in terms that do not accord with the rigidity of the gender binary.
<b>Gender equality</b>	Relates to equal opportunities for all genders to access social, economic and political resources, including legislative protection. Effectively, it describes equality of opportunity.
<b>Gender-transformative approaches</b>	Approaches that challenge and attempt to change problematic gender stereotypes, scripts, norms, the gender binary and the gender hierarchy, which facilitate and maintain gender inequality (Our Watch, 2019b, 2021).
<b>Heteronormativity</b>	The belief that heterosexuality is the preferred and "natural" sexual orientation, which assumes that gender is binary (i.e. men and women). Heteronormativity functions to legitimise social and legal institutions that devalue, marginalise and discriminate against people who deviate from this normative principle (e.g. gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, trans people; American Psychological Association, 2022). The dominance of heteronormative and cisnormative models of domestic and family violence also makes it harder to recognise this violence in LGBTQ+ communities. This bias can contribute to a culture of silence that leads to LGBTQ+ people staying in abusive relationships and not accessing services and other vital support (LGBTIQ+ Health Australia, 2022).

<b>Heterosexual sex scripts</b>	Socially constructed frameworks or “scripts” that guide sexual activity and sexual behaviour. These scripts dictate what one should be doing as a sexual partner (Simon & Gagnon, 1986) and reinforce the widely and implicitly accepted standards for what sex “should” be and look like (Pham, 2016). While individuals shape their own sex scripts in light of their own identity and experiences, sex script theory argues that sexual partners perform sexual encounters according to highly gendered “roles” within the dominant script. More traditional heterosexual sex scripts position men as the active and aggressive initiators of sex, while positioning women as passive sex objects and gatekeepers. In so doing, these scripts privilege men’s sexuality by prioritising men’s sexual gratification and penile–vaginal penetrative sex as the sex act or “real” sex (S. Jackson, 2006; Medley-Rath, 2007).
<b>Hostile sexism</b>	See “Benevolent and hostile sexism”.
<b>Men</b>	A gender identity. In this report, the term is used for respondents who identified as men when asked to state how they describe their gender.
<b>Microaggressions</b>	Everyday, subtle and sometimes overt, intentional or unintentional interactions or behaviours that communicate some type of bias towards historically marginalised groups, including women. People who enact microaggressions may not even be aware of their bias.
<b>Misogyny</b>	A strong dislike of or contempt for women.
<b>Multiple linear regression analysis</b>	A statistical analysis that examines the relationship of a (continuous) outcome variable of interest (e.g. understanding of violence against women) to <i>multiple</i> factors (or input variables) considered together (e.g. multiple demographic characteristics). Unlike bivariate analysis, multiple regression analysis has the advantage that it can determine which of multiple factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are <i>independently</i> related to or “predict” the outcome variable, <i>after</i> accounting for any relationships between the factors</li> <li>• are <i>most important</i> in predicting the outcome variable.</li> </ul>
<b>Multiple logistic regression analysis</b>	A form of multiple regression where the outcome variable is a dichotomous rather than continuous variable.
<b>Non-binary people</b>	A gender identity that sits outside the gender binary of “men” and “women”. The term is often used as an umbrella term that encompasses a range of diverse gender identities. In this report, “non-binary” is used as a collective term for respondents who, when asked to state how they describe their gender: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explicitly identified as non-binary</li> <li>• provided another response that was consistent with a gender identity outside the gender binary.</li> </ul> <p>The latter group of respondents was very small (<math>n = 3</math>). Because this group was too small to be reported on separately, this cohort of respondents has been included within the umbrella term “non-binary” for the purposes of this report.</p>
<b>Non-physical violence</b>	Forms of violence and abuse which do not involve inflicting or threatening physical harm. These forms can include coercive control, financial abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, spiritual abuse or technology-facilitated abuse, among others.
<b>Prosocial bystander</b>	A bystander who chooses a prosocial action in response to witnessing disrespect or abuse. See “Bystander” and “Bystander response”.

<b>Scale</b>	A psychometrically validated group of survey items that measure aspects of the same construct or topic. In the NCAS, scales are used to summarise and demonstrate understanding and attitudes at an <i>overall</i> or broad level. In this report, the scales are used to measure or assess overall change in understanding or attitudes over time, relationships between understanding and attitudes, and relationships between understanding or attitudes and other factors (such as demographic factors).
<b>Sexism</b>	Attitudes, stereotypes, prejudice and other cultural elements that promote discrimination based on gender. See also “Benevolent and hostile sexism”.
<b>Sexual assault</b>	A form of sexual violence. Sexual activity that happens where consent is not freely given or obtained, is withdrawn or the person is unable to consent due to their age or other factors. Sexual assault occurs any time a person is forced, coerced or manipulated into any sexual activity, including coercing a person to engage in sexualised touching, kissing, rape and pornography.
<b>Sexual harassment</b>	A form of sexual violence. An unwelcome sexual advance, sexualised comment, intrusive sexualised question, request for sexual favours or other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that makes a person feel offended, humiliated or intimidated. Can include, but is not limited to, staring or leering; indecent texts, emails or posts; indecent exposure; inappropriate comments; non-consensual sharing of intimate images; and unwanted touching.
<b>Sexuality</b>	The experience of sexual attraction, behaviour and identity (Carman et al., 2021). In this report, when sexuality is discussed in relation to NCAS results, it refers to responses to the item, “How would you describe your sexuality?”, with the stated options of “heterosexual/straight”, “lesbian”, “gay”, “bisexual or pansexual”, “queer”, “another term (please specify)”, “prefer not to say”.
<b>Sexual violence</b>	An umbrella term that encompasses sexual activity without consent being obtained or freely given. It occurs any time a person is forced, coerced or manipulated into any unwanted sexual activity, such as touching, sexual harassment and intimidation, forced marriage, trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, sexual assault and rape.
<b>Significant</b>	Throughout this report, “significant” is used to refer to “statistically significant” results where we can be confident (with 95% certainty) that the difference observed in the survey sample is meaningful and likely to represent a true difference in the Australian population ( $p < 0.05$ ) that is not negligible in size (Cohen’s $d \geq 0.2$ or equivalent). Significant findings in this report are denoted by the * symbol.
<b>Social norms</b>	Shared standards of acceptable behaviour that may be an informal understanding within groups or across broader society that govern behaviour, or may take the form of codified rules and conduct expectations.
<b>Stalking</b>	A form of violence that can occur in person or via the use of technology. It involves a pattern of repeated behaviour with the intent to maintain contact with, or exercise power and control over, another person. Examples of stalking behaviours include tracking or following someone (in person or online) and loitering.
<b>Socioeconomic status of area</b>	An Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) measure of the socioeconomic conditions in geographic areas in terms of people’s access to material and social resources, and their opportunity to participate in society (SEIFA quintiles; ABS, 2018).

<b>Subscale</b>	A component of a psychometrically validated scale that taps into a particular aspect of the construct underlying the scale, such as an aspect of understanding of or attitudes towards violence against women or gender inequality. Factor analyses were used to subdivide items within a scale into subscales based on which items were answered most similarly to one another by respondents, most likely because they are more conceptually related. Subscales were also validated using Rasch analysis.
<b>Technology-facilitated abuse</b>	An umbrella term used to refer to forms of abuse where technology is the conduit or means of enacting or exercising abuse. Examples of technology-facilitated abuse include harassment, stalking, impersonation and threats via technology, as well as image-based abuse and other forms of abuse online (eSafety Commissioner [eSafety] 2022; Powell & Henry, 2019).
<b>Trauma-informed care</b>	A strengths-based framework that is grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma. It emphasises the physical, psychological and emotional safety of victims and survivors, as well as first responders and service providers, and creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment (Hopper et al., 2010).
<b>Victims and survivors</b>	Refers to those who have experienced violence. We use this term to recognise both the harm experienced and the resilience of those who experience violence. The term recognises the diverse experiences of violence, although we acknowledge that not all people who experience violence will use this term to describe themselves.
<b>Violence against women</b>	Violence that is specifically directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately. It includes any act of violence based on or driven by gender that causes, or could cause, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of harm or coercion, in public or in private life.
<b>Women</b>	A term describing a gender identity. In this report, the term is used for respondents who identified as women when asked to state how they describe their gender.



# About the NCAS

The **National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey** (NCAS) is a periodic, representative survey of the Australian population that is conducted every four years. The NCAS measures the Australian community's understanding and attitudes regarding violence against women, their attitudes towards gender inequality and their intentions to intervene when witnessing violence or disrespect against women.

It was established as a key means of monitoring progress against the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (the *National Plan 2010–2022*) and will continue to evaluate progress against the current *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* (the *National Plan 2022–2032*; Council of Australian Governments [COAG], 2010b, 2022). Community understanding and attitudes regarding violence against women are shaped by, and in part reflect, social norms embedded in organisational, community, institutional and societal practices, systems and structures.

Thus, the NCAS functions as a gauge for how Australia is progressing in changing the broader climate that facilitates and maintains violence against women. By highlighting problematic areas in the community's understanding and attitudes towards violence against women, the NCAS provides valuable evidence to inform policy and practice in the prevention of this violence.



**The 2021 NCAS sample consisted of 19,100 Australians aged 16 years or over, who were interviewed via mobile telephone.**

The findings of the 2021 NCAS demonstrate gradual improvements in community understanding and attitudes regarding gender inequality and violence against women, suggesting encouraging progress towards the achievement of a community that offers equal opportunities to women and is safe and free from violence against women. However, further intervention is still necessary where harmful individual and social norms prevail. It is important to continue to challenge biases, myths and misconceptions regarding violence against women and gender inequality because these biases reflect the societal culture, including broad practices, processes, systems and structures, that maintains gender inequality and violence against women. These attitudes are also enacted in the responses to violence by police, the judiciary and community services in ways that may fail to deter perpetrators of violence against women and serve as systemic barriers to victims and survivors seeking justice and support.



# 1 Introduction: Violence against women and the need for action

## 1.1 Climate of violence against women

### Prevalence of violence against women

Violence against women, including violence perpetrated within intimate, domestic and family relationships, is a fundamental violation of human rights and a global social, health and economic problem (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014; World Health Organization [WHO], 2021).



**In Australia, population-based prevalence studies indicate that, since the age of 15 years:**

**1 in 2 women**  
have experienced  
**sexual harassment**

**1 in 5 women**  
have experienced  
**sexual violence**

**1 in 4 women**  
have experienced  
**emotional abuse by a  
current or former partner**

**1 in 6 women**  
have experienced  
**physical violence  
by a partner**

**1 in 6 women**  
have experienced **stalking**

(Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2017)





## **Across the world, population-level data confirms that domestic violence is predominantly gendered. Women are overwhelmingly the victims of violence in intimate relationships and sexual violence and men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators of this violence.**

(ABS, 2017; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014; WHO, 2021)

Women are also much more likely than men to suffer serious harm because of this violence, with Australian women around six times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of domestic violence and around four times more likely to be murdered by an intimate partner (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare [AIHW], 2022a, 2022b; Serpell et al., 2022).

### **Demographic factors correlated with risk of victimisation**

The intersections of a range of structural and systemic forms of oppression and discrimination produce particular forms and patterns of violence against women, increase the prevalence or severity of this violence, and limit or undermine individual and systemic consequences for the use of this violence. A wide range of demographic factors have been associated with increased risk of women experiencing violence including cultural, ethnic, age, ability, gender and sexuality factors (Kulkarni, 2019; K. Morgan et al., 2016; Our Watch, 2021, p. 17; Our Watch et al., 2015; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Thiara et al., 2011). For example, all forms of violence against Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women occur at higher rates and are more likely to have severe physical and social impacts than violence against non-Indigenous Australian women (ABS, 2017; AIHW, 2018; Bartels, 2010; Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, 2013; eSafety Commissioner [eSafety], 2017; Our Watch, 2018b; Powell et al., 2022). Similarly, based on specific cultural or religious imperatives, some women may be at heightened risk of specific forms of culturally sanctioned violence, such as forced or child marriage, marital rape, dowry-related violence and female genital mutilation (Adinkrah, 2011; Gethin, 2019; Lyneham & Bricknell, 2018; Ogunsiji et al., 2018; WHO, 2022). The prevalence of different types of violence also varies by age. Younger women are at higher risk of many forms of violence, including stalking, sexual assault, sexual harassment and intimate partner violence, compared to both younger men and older women (ABS, 2017; AIHW, 2019b). Older women have higher risk than older men of specific

forms of elder abuse, such as neglect, sexual abuse and psychological abuse (Qu et al., 2021). Evidence over the last decade also indicates that LGBTQ+ people are more likely to experience sexual violence and family violence (DeKeseredy et al., 2021; Edwards, Sylaska, Barry, et al., 2015; Edwards, Sylaska, & Neal, 2015; Horsley, 2015; Messinger, 2017; Peitzmeier et al., 2020; Snyder et al., 2018). Likewise, evidence indicates that women with disability have increased prevalence of certain types of violence or abuse, such as emotional abuse by a current or former partner (AIHW, 2019b; Lund, 2020; Mailhot Amborski et al., 2021; Tomsa et al., 2021).

### **Impacts of violence against women**

Violence against women produces a profound and long-term toll on victims' and survivors' health and wellbeing, on families and communities, and on our broader society. These consequences include acute and chronic health impacts for victims and survivors, such as depressive, anxiety and alcohol use disorders; early pregnancy loss; physical injury and homicide; and suicide and self-inflicted injuries (ABS, 2017; AIHW, 2019a; Serpell et al., 2022). In addition, domestic and family violence engenders significant social and psychological costs for victims and survivors, their families, and the broader community, with increased risk of child abuse and neglect and of adverse impacts on emotional and psychological wellbeing, cognitive functioning, learning, and the ability to develop positive relationships (Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety [ANROWS], 2018; AIHW, 2019a; Dembo et al., 2018; KPMG, 2016; Miller-Graff et al., 2016). The total economic cost of violence against women in Australia in 2015–16 was estimated to be \$22–26 billion (KPMG, 2016). The prevalence and adverse impacts of violence against women reveal that considerable progress is needed to meet the target of the National Plan 2022–2032 to “end violence against women and children in one generation” (Council of Australian Governments [COAG], 2022, p. 55).



## Violence against women produces a profound and long-term toll on victims' and survivors' health and wellbeing, on families and communities, and on our broader society.

### Key events regarding violence against women since 2017

Key events in Australia and globally since the 2017 NCAS may have amplified the focus on violence against women. One noteworthy global event since the last NCAS is the COVID-19 pandemic. The balance of evidence indicates that the pandemic exacerbated violence against women and its adverse impacts (AIHW, 2021; Boxall & Morgan, 2021; Dalton, 2020; Gosangi et al., 2020; Kourtí et al., 2021). Indeed, some authors have described gender-based violence in the era of COVID-19 as a “twin” or “shadow” pandemic (Dlamini, 2021; Pfitzner et al., 2020; Sri et al., 2021). Several factors may have contributed to the observed increases in violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic, including situational stressors, such as lockdowns necessitating close ongoing contact between victims and survivors and perpetrators; job losses leading to economic hardship; reduced access to support services (particularly face-to-face services); and a range of other individual exacerbating factors (Boserup et al., 2020; Nancarrow, 2020; Zhang, 2020).

Beyond the pandemic, however, a context of tolerance, wilful ignorance and endorsement of violence against women has persisted both internationally and within Australia between 2017 and 2022, exemplified by a series of high-profile legal cases and incidents of violence. However, the period since 2017 was also one of increased momentum and advocacy, with pivotal movements and legislative reforms focused on rejecting violence against women. For example, the #MeToo movement brought violence against women to the forefront of public consciousness and this impetus for change spread swiftly from the internet to courtrooms and the broader international community (Chandra & Erlingsdóttir, 2021; Hillstrom, 2019).

In Australia, community pressure and advocacy resulted in steps towards changing the way sexual assault is recognised

and legally defined, with “affirmative” sexual consent becoming the standard for assessing the occurrence of sexual assault in some jurisdictions, although this standard is yet to be adopted across Australia (ACT Government, 2022; NSW Government, 2021; Premier of Victoria, 2022; Rape and Sexual Assault Research and Advocacy, 2021; Teach Us Consent, 2021; The STOP Campaign, 2022). New South Wales was one of the earliest states to change its consent laws and now requires individuals to establish affirmative consent by taking active steps to confirm consent, recognising that silence or lack of resistance does not constitute consent and that consent may be withdrawn at any point during sexual activity (NSW Government Communities and Justice, 2022). However, this standard is yet to be adopted uniformly across Australia.

Similarly, there have been significant shifts towards addressing and legislating against coercive control as a form of domestic and family violence. Coercive control is an abusive pattern of behaviour used to establish and maintain power over another person and may include limiting a partner’s access to money, controlling who they see, threats and intimidation, persistent texting and tracking their movements, and a range of other behaviours (COAG, 2022). The Australian Government’s *National principles to address coercive control: Consultation draft* was released in September 2022 and aims to facilitate a coordinated national approach to coercive control in terms of criminalisation as well as primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery. It provides guidance to states and territories to consider their approach to coercive control in consultation with victims and survivors and with careful consideration of potential unintended consequences of criminalisation and impacts on the communities in their jurisdiction (ANROWS, 2021; Meeting of Attorneys-General, 2022).

## 1.2 Facilitators of a climate of violence

### Social ecology of violence against women

Violence against women is a complex phenomenon that is underpinned by multiple factors (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2022; Heise, 1998; Our Watch, 2021). The socioecological model of violence against women considers the complex interplay between factors at all the different levels within society: the individual and relationship level, the organisational and community level, the system and institutional level, and the societal level (CDC, 2022; Heise, 1998). These interacting factors across the social ecology can place people at greater risk or buffer them from experiencing or perpetrating violence (CDC, 2022; Heise, 1998). Crucially, the socioecological model recognises both gender inequality and other inequalities

underpinned by oppression and discrimination as *key underlying drivers* of violence against women and drivers of differential outcomes from the perpetration of this violence (Carman et al., 2020; Hulley et al., 2021; Our Watch, 2021; Weldon & Kerr, 2020). Gender, economic and social inequalities that maintain violence against women can be facilitated or disrupted at each level within the social ecology, including:

- *at the societal level* through social and cultural norms and broad health, economic, educational and social policies (CDC, 2022; Flood, 2020; Lowe et al., 2022; Rizzo et al., 2020; Sabol et al., 2020)
- *at the system and institutional level* through formal and informal structures, rules and legislation, such as those pertaining to patriarchal hierarchies (Hardesty & Ogolsky, 2020; Our Watch, 2021; Song et al., 2020)
- *at the organisational and community level* through norms, structures and practices, such as those in schools, workplaces and neighbourhoods (Banyard et al., 2019; Copp et al., 2019; C. Jackson & Sundaram, 2018; Kidman & Kohler, 2020; Yeo et al., 2021)
- *at the individual and relationship level* through people's experiences, attitudes, knowledge and skills, and their peer, intimate and familial relationships (Bell & Higgins, 2015; Corboz et al., 2016; DeKeseredy et al., 2018; Flood, 2008, 2019a; Ha et al., 2019; Hamai & Felitti, 2021; Kimber et al., 2015; Leen et al., 2012; Ogilvie et al., 2022).

## Gender inequality as a driver of violence against women

Many forms of violence against women are underpinned by gender inequality, which can be manifested in the gender norms, structures, systems and practices that privilege men and discriminate against women (Flood, 2019b; Our Watch, 2021; Webster et al., 2018; WHO, 2022). Gender inequality is a social problem in which women and men do not have equal social standing, value, power, resources or opportunities in society, providing a key context that facilitates and maintains violence against women (Our Watch, 2021). Australia lags behind many countries on various indicators of gender equality (Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2018; Workplace Gender Equality Agency [WGEA], 2022). Attitudes supportive of gender inequality have been associated with the actual perpetration of violence against women (Ozaki & Otis, 2017; Pöllänen et al., 2018; Reed et al., 2018; Verroya et al., 2022; Wahid et al., 2018). Gendered drivers of violence include attitudes which condone violence against women, support rigid gender roles, tolerate disrespect or aggression towards women, and endorse limits to women's decision-making and independence (Our Watch, 2021). These gendered

drivers are informed by two key operating principles, namely sexist ideology and misogyny (Manne, 2017; Our Watch, 2021). Sexist ideology is defined by rigid gendered beliefs which justify existing systems and structures and maintain patriarchal social relations (Our Watch, 2021). Sexism can be overtly "hostile" or it can be more subtle and seemingly "benevolent" in that it is enacted under the guise of men's role to protect and provide for women (Glick & Fiske, 1997). Misogyny is a moral manifestation of sexist ideology involving "hostile" prejudice and contempt of women, and functions to enforce patriarchal social relations wherever they are challenged (Manne, 2017; Respect Victoria & Our Watch, 2022). The Change the Story framework also identifies four reinforcing factors which do not drive violence on their own but can contribute to or exacerbate violence against women. These are condoning of violence in general, the experience of and exposure to violence, a range of factors that weaken prosocial behaviour, and resistance to or backlash against violence prevention and gender equality (Our Watch, 2021).

## Other inequalities as drivers of violence against women: An intersectional approach

However, gender inequality is not the sole driver of violence against women, nor necessarily the principal driver of violence and abuse in all contexts (Our Watch, 2021). Violence against women also occurs within a context of multiple, intersecting and mutually compounding forms of oppression, discrimination, and unequal power and privilege, which operate within and across each level of the social ecology (Our Watch, 2021). These intersecting inequalities can increase the prevalence or severity of violence, produce different manifestations of violence and differential outcomes, and weaken individual and structural consequences for the use of violence against marginalised women (Annamma et al., 2018; Carman et al., 2020; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Fiolet et al., 2019; Ghafournia & Easta, 2018; Kulkarni, 2019; Lockhart & Danis, 2010; E. M. Morgan & Zurbriggen, 2016; Our Watch, 2018a, 2018b, 2021; Our Watch & Women with Disabilities Victoria, 2021; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Thiara et al., 2011). For example, intersecting inequalities have been argued to produce specific barriers to help-seeking or worse outcomes for particular groups of marginalised women, including Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women, migrant and refugee women, women with disability and LGBTQ+ women (Callander et al., 2019; Calton et al., 2015; Cripps, 2021; Edwards, Sylaska, & Neal, 2015; Femi-Ajao et al., 2020; Frawley & Wilson, 2016; Hulley et al., 2021; Koh et al., 2021; Langton et al., 2020; Messinger, 2017; Murray et al., 2019; Nancarrow et al., 2020; Serrato Calero et al., 2020; Stein et al., 2018; Streur et al., 2019; Ussher et al., 2020; Watego et al., 2021).

## Individual attitudes and violence against women

Individual attitudes are an important factor in the facilitation and perpetuation of violence against women, as identified in the sociological model discussed above. “Attitudes” are defined as evaluations of a particular subject (e.g. a person, concept, behaviour or event) and usually exist along a continuum from less to more favourable (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Attitudes comprise three components: a cognitive component, reflecting thoughts and beliefs about the subject; an affective component, reflecting feelings associated with the subject; and a behavioural component, reflecting the attitude’s influence on actual behaviour (Breckler, 1984; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). An attitude may be explicit or implicit – that is, the individual may or may not be consciously aware of their attitude and how it impacts their behaviour. Although attitudes are often enduring, they can potentially be altered via new experiences and education (Albarracín & Shavitt, 2018; Suedfeld, 2017).

The relationship between an individual’s attitudes and their behaviour is not straightforward. The motivational bases and characteristics of the attitude, such as its intensity and importance, can affect how much the attitude will impact behaviour (Kelman, 2017). Attitudes are only one of the factors that can influence behaviour. According to the socioecological model, people’s attitudes are an individual-level factor that can interact with a broad range of other factors at different levels of society to facilitate violence against women (Callaghan et al., 2018; Debowska et al., 2015; Ozaki & Otis, 2017; Seff, 2021).

The NCAS examines individual understanding and attitudes regarding violence against women, gender inequality and intentions to intervene prosocially as a witness to violence against women, providing a snapshot of the “normative” or typical attitudes and understanding of the Australian community regarding violence against women at a specific point in time.

Given that attitudes are shaped by, and in part reflect, broader organisational, community, institutional and societal systems and structures, the NCAS also functions as a gauge for how Australia is progressing in changing the broader climate that facilitates and maintains violence against women.

## 1.3 Deconstructing the climate of violence: Prevention

The impacts of violence against women can be reduced by taking decisive action to prevent violence before it starts, intervening early, responding appropriately to violence when it occurs, and supporting recovery and healing (COAG, 2022). Ending violence against women requires addressing the range of drivers and oppressions that enable and reinforce violence against women, including violence against the most marginalised groups of women who remain overrepresented in victimisation data and who confront unique challenges in accessing support and assistance (Kulkarni, 2019; K. Morgan et al., 2016; Our Watch, 2021; Our Watch et al., 2015; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Thiara et al., 2011).

As outlined in the National Plan 2022-2032, initiatives for preventing violence against women can be divided into four types (COAG, 2022; Our Watch, 2021; VicHealth, 2017):

- *Prevention* (also described as primary prevention) – working to change the underlying social drivers of violence by addressing the attitudes and systems that drive violence against women and children to stop it before it starts.
- *Early intervention* (also described as secondary prevention) – identifying and supporting individuals who are at high risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence and preventing violence from escalating or reoccurring.
- *Response* (also described as tertiary prevention) – providing services and supports to address existing violence and support victims and survivors experiencing violence, including via crisis support and police intervention, and fostering a trauma-informed justice system that will hold people who use violence to account.
- *Recovery and healing* (also described as tertiary prevention) – helping to reduce the risk of victim and survivor re-traumatisation, and supporting victims and survivors to be safe and healthy, and to recover from trauma and the physical, mental, emotional, and economic impacts of violence (COAG, 2022).

For clarity, throughout this report, “primary prevention” is used to refer specifically to actions consistent with Domain 1 (Prevention) from the National Plan 2022–2032. In addition, “prevention” is used as a more general term that can include actions consistent with any, some or all of the domains of the National Plan 2022–2032 (COAG, 2022).

The National Plan 2022–2032 also describes six guiding principles that inform action on the four domains to address violence against women (Our Watch, 2021a; COAG, 2022). The six guiding principles are:

- *Advancing gender equality*, which recognises that achieving gender equality is fundamental to both advancing human rights for Australians and addressing a key driver of violence against women. The National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality is a federal government initiative that seeks to address the structural, social and economic barriers to advancing gender equality in Australia (COAG, 2022).
- *Closing the Gap*, which is an agreement by all Australian governments and the Coalition of Peaks, a representative body of over 80 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community-controlled peak organisations and members. The objective of this agreement is to enable Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and governments to work together to overcome the inequality experienced by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, including in relation to violence against women.
- *Centring victim and survivors* ensures that their lived experiences, perspectives and direct knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of current systems, structures and interventions is acknowledged, heard and respected as a key ingredient for policy development and reform.
- *Accountability*, which is an intention to focus attention and expectations on the actions of people who choose to use violence. This involves trust and support for victims and survivors and avoiding victim-blaming in any context. Similarly, perpetrators are to be held accountable and supported to take responsibility for their violence with appropriate legal and social sanctions and consequences.
- *Intersectionality*, which recognises that violence against women exists in relation to multiple and intersecting structural and systemic forms of discrimination, such as racism, colonialism, ableism, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia, and ageism. This recognises that gender and gender inequality may be constructed and experienced differently and may not be the most significant factor in violence against all women. Actions from prevention through to recovery and healing must therefore respond to the diversity of women and children.
- *Person-centred co-ordination and integration*, which strives for trauma-informed, person-focused and holistically integrated responses from the specialised services and systems that support victims and survivors through their recovery and healing.

Prevention of violence against women requires multiple types of actions and initiatives across the social ecology, including in key settings such as schools and universities, workplaces, clubs and sporting institutions, and the media, and in the justice and health service systems (COAG, 2022; Our Watch, 2021).

The NCAS instrument is premised on the idea that achieving the objective of ending violence against women in one generation, is facilitated by the population:

- having a strong understanding of the nature of violence against women, including its diverse and nuanced forms (see National Plan 2022–2032, “Early intervention key indicators”; COAG, 2022, p. 31)
- strongly rejecting attitudes that condone gender inequality and violence against women (see National Plan 2022–2032, “Prevention key indicators”; COAG, 2022, p. 31)
- being prepared to intervene when witnessing violence or abuse against women (see National Plan 2022–2032, “Early intervention key indicators”; COAG, 2022, p. 31).



# 2 Research design

## 2.1 Aims of the 2021 NCAS

- Benchmark the Australian population's understanding and attitudes regarding violence against women, attitudes towards gender equality and intention to intervene prosocially when witnessing abuse or disrespect of women
- Determine if understanding and attitudes have improved since the 2017 NCAS
- Identify any notable gaps in understanding or more problematic attitudes
- Identify demographic, attitudinal and contextual factors that are associated with problematic understanding and attitudes



## 2.2 2021 NCAS instrument

The 2021 instrument included demographic items, items measuring understanding or attitudes regarding violence against women, attitudes towards gender inequality, and scenario-based items examining bystander responses when witnessing abuse or disrespect against women (Figure 2-1). Most items were retained from the 2017 NCAS to ensure reliable measurement of changes over time.

### Items and scales measuring understanding and attitudes

Understanding and attitude items were grouped into nine psychometric scales, validated via Rasch analysis. The strength of psychometrically validated scales is that they can measure a complex overall construct or concept (such as attitudes towards violence) that would be difficult to measure with a single item. The scales include the Gendered Violence and Inequality Scale (GVIS), which is an overarching “mega scale” that includes all understanding and attitude items that sit in one of the other eight scales. The other eight scales included three “main” scales, namely:

- the Understanding of Violence against Women Scale (UVAWS)
- the Attitudes towards Gender Inequality Scale (AGIS)
- the Attitudes towards Violence against Women Scale (AVAWS).

Each main scale also includes subscales (identified via factor analysis), which measure key themes within the broader construct measured by the scale. In addition, five “type of violence” scales were developed to measure attitudes towards specific types of violence, namely:

- the Domestic Violence Scale (DVS)
- the Sexual Violence Scale (SVS), which was divided into the Sexual Assault Scale (SAS) and the Sexual Harassment Scale (SHS)
- the Technology-Facilitated Abuse Scale (TFAS).

All type of violence scales measure attitudes, apart from the TFAS which measures both understanding and attitudes regarding technology-facilitated abuse. Together, the Domestic Violence Scale (DVS) and Sexual Violence Scale (SVS) comprised all but two of the 43 items in the Attitudes towards Violence against Women Scale (AVAWS).

### Changes to NCAS instrument

New or revised demographic items were included in 2021 on gender, sexuality and disability to provide additional and more inclusive demographic information, including capturing gender identity, diversity and experience more accurately and better capturing the range of physical, mental health and intellectual conditions and their impact on core activities. For the first time, the NCAS provides results for non-binary respondents and sexuality-diverse respondents.

New items were also added to better measure understanding and attitudes regarding forms of violence that have emerged more recently or have not been a major focus of the NCAS previously. Items were added on forms of violence against women that are related to intersectional forms of oppression, based on a partner’s migrant status, disability, gender experience, sexuality or religion. Items were also added on technology-facilitated abuse, sexual harassment and stalking.

## 2.3 Sampling

The sample consisted of 19,100 Australians aged 16 years or over, who were interviewed via mobile telephone. The sampling approach largely involved random digit dialling (RDD) of mobile telephones, which was supplemented or “topped up” with listed mobile telephones. Eighty-one per cent of the interviews were achieved via RDD mobiles. The response rate was 11 per cent.<sup>1</sup>

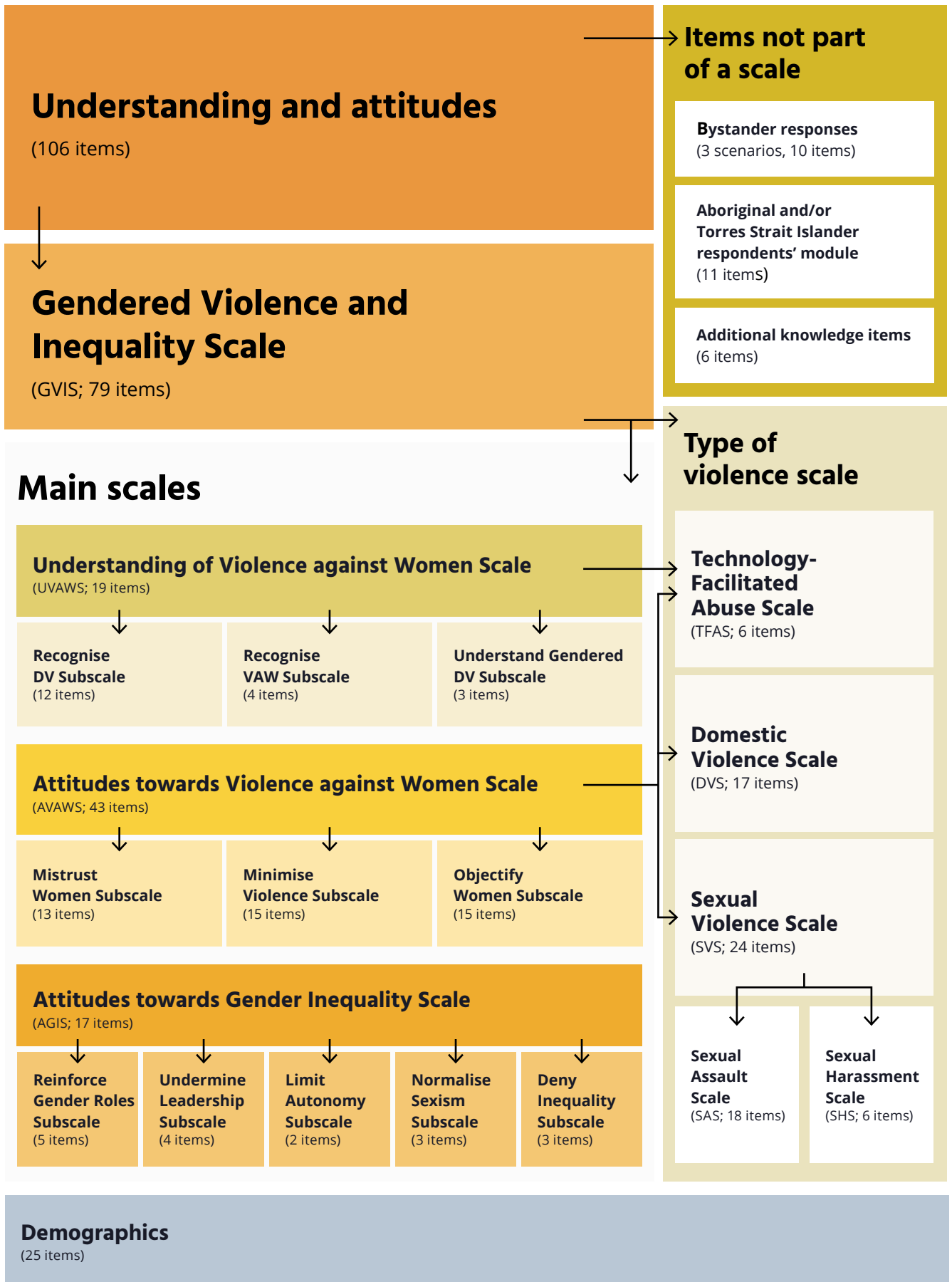
### Weighting

To strengthen confidence that the survey results accurately represent the population, responses were weighted based on population benchmarks to align the sample and population demographic profiles within each state and territory.

<sup>1</sup> The cooperation rate was 80.1 per cent and the refusal rate was 15.0 per cent. See *Technical report*, section T8.4 (Coumarelos et al., 2023), for the calculation of the response, cooperation and refusal rates.

Figure 2-1:

# Components of the NCAS instrument, 2021



Note: DV = domestic violence; VAW = violence against women.

## 2.4 Analysis and reporting

Data analysis was conducted both on individual items and on scale and subscale scores.

**Item codes:** To simplify reporting, each item was assigned an alphanumeric code (e.g. “V1”). The letter in the code identifies the item’s thematic topic (V = violence against women; D = domestic violence; S = sexual violence; G = gender inequality; B = bystander response). The number corresponds to the order that items within a thematic topic are presented in the NCAS instrument.

**Scale scores:** Each respondent received a (rescaled Rasch) score on each scale and subscale, based on their responses to the items in the scale or subscale. Scores on each scale or subscale could range from 0 to 100. As a society committed to reducing violence against women, we are aiming for higher scores on all NCAS scales and subscales. Higher scores indicate a higher understanding of violence against women (UVAWS, TFAS), higher attitudinal rejection of gender inequality (AGIS) and higher attitudinal rejection of violence against women in its various forms (AVAWS, DVS, SVS, SAS, SHS, TFAS).

**“Advanced” understanding and rejection of problematic attitudes:** For each scale, each respondent was placed into one of two categories: “advanced” or “developing”. For the UVAWS, these categories represented “advanced” or “developing” understanding. For the scales measuring attitudes (AGIS, AVAWS, DVS, SVS), these categories represented “advanced” or “developing” rejection of problematic attitudes. The criteria used to define “advanced” understanding and “advanced” attitudes were as follows:

- Respondents in the “advanced” understanding category answered “yes, always” the behaviour is violence to at least 75 per cent of the UVAWS items and “yes, usually” to the remaining UVAWS items (or the equivalent).
- Respondents in the “advanced” rejection category for each attitude scale “strongly disagreed” with at least 75 per cent of the items in the scale, which described problematic attitudes, and “somewhat disagreed” with the remaining items in the scale (or the equivalent).<sup>2</sup>

Univariate, bivariate and multivariate data analyses were conducted as summarised below.

**Univariate analysis** involves one variable only and was used to report on the sample’s responses to each understanding, attitude and bystander item and the percentage of the sample categorised as having “advanced” understanding or attitudes according to each scale.

**Bivariate analysis** examines the direct or straightforward relationship between two variables only, such as an outcome of interest (e.g. understanding of violence against women) and one other variable or factor (e.g. a demographic factor such as age), without taking into account the effect of any other variables or factors.

**Multiple regression** examines the relationship of an outcome variable of interest (e.g. attitudes towards violence against women) to *multiple* factors (or input variables) considered together (e.g. multiple demographic characteristics). Multiple regression analysis has the advantage that it can determine which of multiple factors are *independently* related to or “predict” the outcome variable, *after* accounting for any relationships between the factors, and are *most important* in predicting the outcome variable.

Up to four multiple regression models<sup>3</sup> were conducted for each outcome variable (UVAWS, AGIS, AVAWS, and likelihood of bystander responses) to examine whether the outcome variable could be predicted by:

- demographic factors (Model 1)
- relevant scale scores (Model 2)
- demographic factors and relevant scale scores combined (Model 3)
- relevant subscales (Model 4).

Throughout the report “significant” refers to *statistically significant* findings where we can be confident (with 95% certainty) that the difference observed in the survey sample is meaningful and likely to represent a true difference in the Australian population ( $p < 0.05$ ) that is not negligible in size (Cohen’s  $d \geq 0.2$  or equivalent).

2 The “advanced” TFAS category means that the respondent answered “yes, always” the behaviour is violence or “strongly disagreed” with problematic attitudes for at least 75 per cent of items, and answered the remaining items “yes, usually” or “somewhat disagree”.

3 Multiple linear regression was used when the outcome variables were scale scores (continuous variables) and multiple logistic regression was used when the outcomes variables were likelihood of bystander responses (dichotomous variables).





# 3 Findings: Benchmarking understanding and attitudes

**Benchmarking the population’s understanding and attitudes regarding gender equality and violence against women over time allows us to track Australia’s progress towards key indicators for “ending gender-based violence in one generation” (COAG, 2022, p. 28). Scores on the NCAS scales were used to report on the Australian population’s understanding and attitudes in 2021 and over time.**



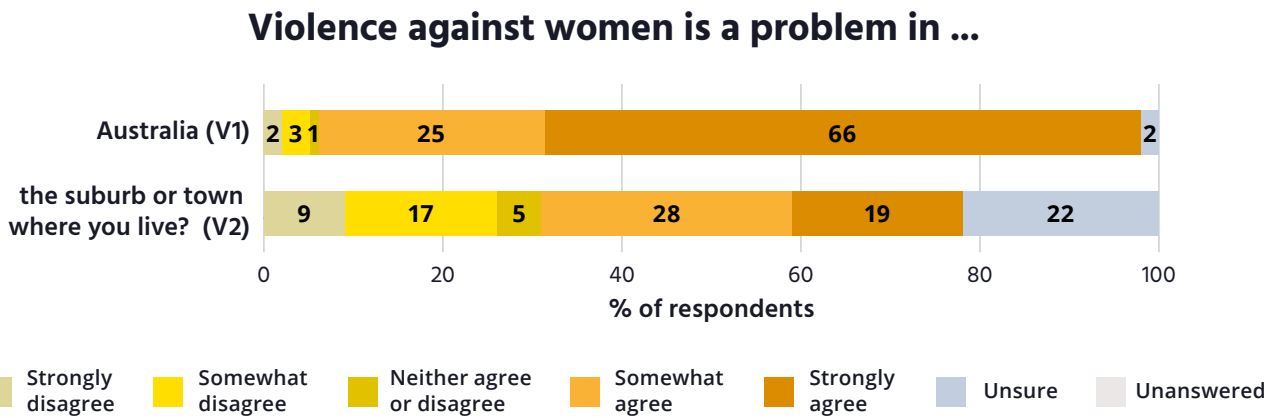
## CHAPTER RESULTS SUMMARY

### **Benchmarking understanding and attitudes**

- Australians’ understanding and attitudes regarding violence against women and gender inequality have improved slowly but significantly over time, with significant improvement on all NCAS scales between 2013 and 2021.
- Between 2017 and 2021, there were significant improvements in Australians’ understanding of violence against women and attitudinal rejection of gender inequality. While attitudinal rejection of sexual violence also improved significantly between 2017 and 2021, attitudinal rejection of domestic violence plateaued during this period. Nonetheless, Australians’ understanding of violence and their attitudes to both gender inequality and violence against women were at a comparable level in 2021.

In 2021, while respondents had high awareness that violence against women is a national problem, their awareness that violence against women transcends all communities, including their own local area, was much lower (Figure 3-1). Specifically, most respondents agreed, either somewhat or strongly, that violence against women is a problem in Australia (91%; item V1). However, far fewer respondents agreed, either somewhat or strongly, that violence against women is a problem in the suburb or town where they live (47%; item V2). This finding suggests a misconception that violence tends to occur generally outside one’s own networks, rather than everywhere, which may impede recognition that violence is a community-wide social problem requiring action at all levels of society.

Figure 3-1: Perception of violence against women as a problem, 2021



**Note:** N = 5,120. Percentages in the figure do not always add to 100 due to rounding.

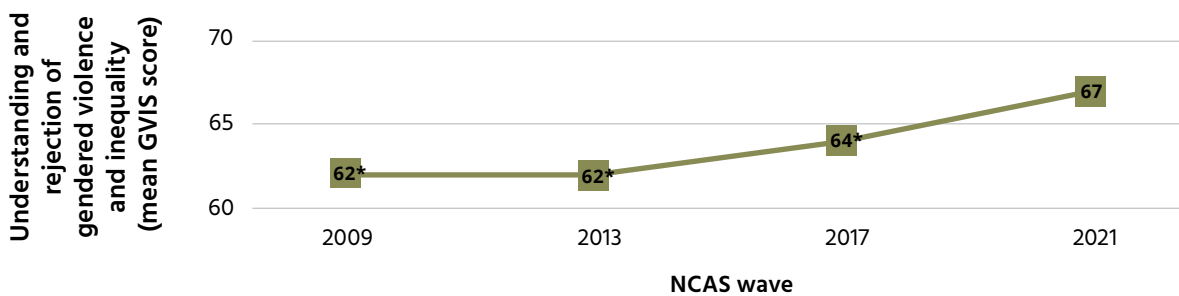
### 3.1 Change in understanding and attitudes over time

Figures 3-2 to 3-4 show changes in mean scale scores over time. The Australian population's overall understanding and attitudinal rejection of gendered violence and gender inequality improved significantly over time (mean GVIS score; Figure 3-2). In 2021 compared to previous years (2009, 2013 and 2017), respondents demonstrated significantly higher understanding of violence against women (mean UVAWS score) and significantly higher attitudinal rejection of gender inequality (mean AGIS score; Figure 3-3). However, attitudinal rejection of violence against women improved more slowly (mean

AVAWS score). There was no significant improvement in rejection of violence against women between 2017 and 2021, despite a significant improvement compared to 2009 and 2013 (mean AVAWS score; Figure 3-3). This plateauing since 2017 on the AVAWS largely reflected a lack of significant improvement in attitudes towards domestic violence (mean DVS score), as attitudes towards sexual violence (mean SVS score) did show significant improvement between 2017 and 2021 (Figure 3-4).

The mean scores in 2021 were similar for the three main scales (UVAWS, AGIS, AVAWS), indicating that the population's understanding of violence and its attitudes towards both gender inequality and violence against women were at a comparable level in 2021 (Figure 3-3).

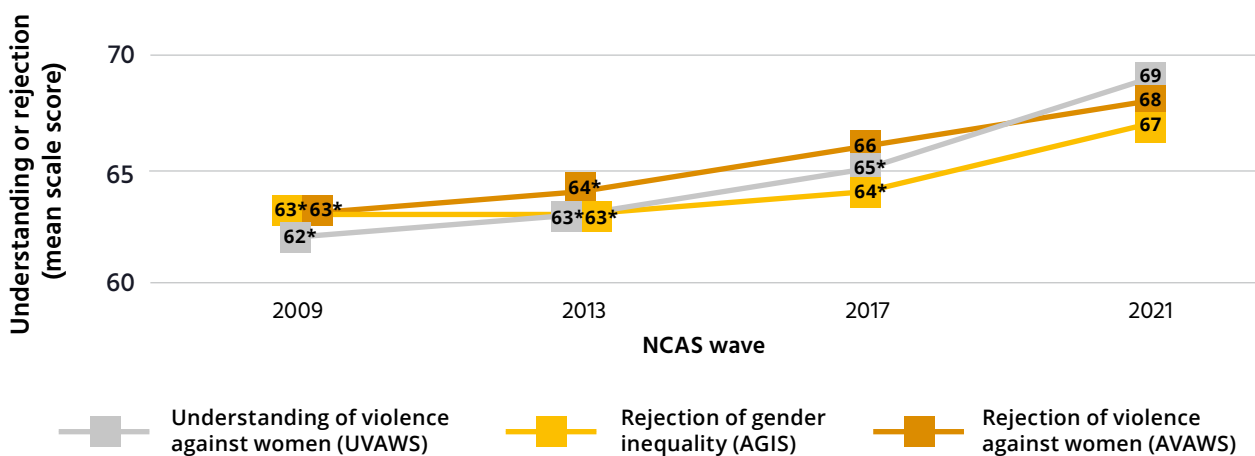
Figure 3-2: Understanding and rejection of gendered violence and inequality (GVIS scores) over time, 2009 to 2021



**Note:** *Ns* in 2009, 2013, 2017 and 2021 were as follows: 10,102; 17,508; 17,540; 19,099.

\* Statistically significant difference on this scale between the year indicated and 2021.

Figure 3-3: Understanding (UVAWS) and attitudes (AGIS, AVAWS) over time, 2009 to 2021

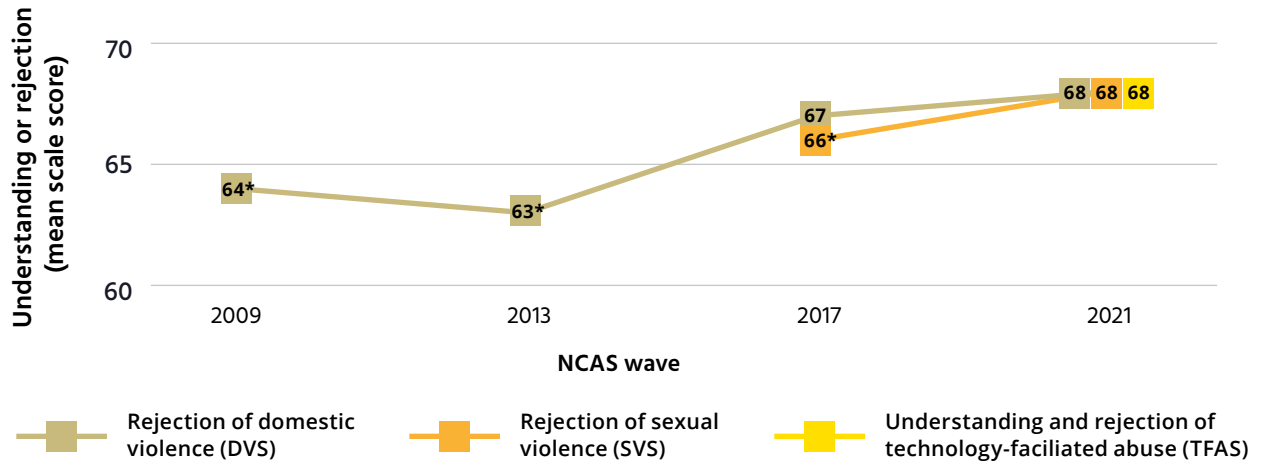


**Note:** *Ns* in 2009, 2013, 2017 and 2021 were as follows:

- UVAWS – 10,033; 17,402; 8,606; 19,096
- AGIS – 8,909; 15,178; 17,528; 19,040
- AVAWS – 3,743; 5,478; 17,538; 19,097.

\* Statistically significant difference on this scale between the year indicated and 2021.

Figure 3-4: Understanding (TFAS) and attitudes (DVS, SVS, TFAS) regarding types of violence over time, 2009 to 2021



**Note:** “na” below means reliable data was not available. *Ns* in 2009, 2013, 2017 and 2021 were:  
 • DVS – 4,970; 6,850; 17,537; 19,088  
 • SVS – na; na; 17,419; 19,031  
 • TFAS – na; na; na; 19,067.

There were no significant differences between scales in 2021.

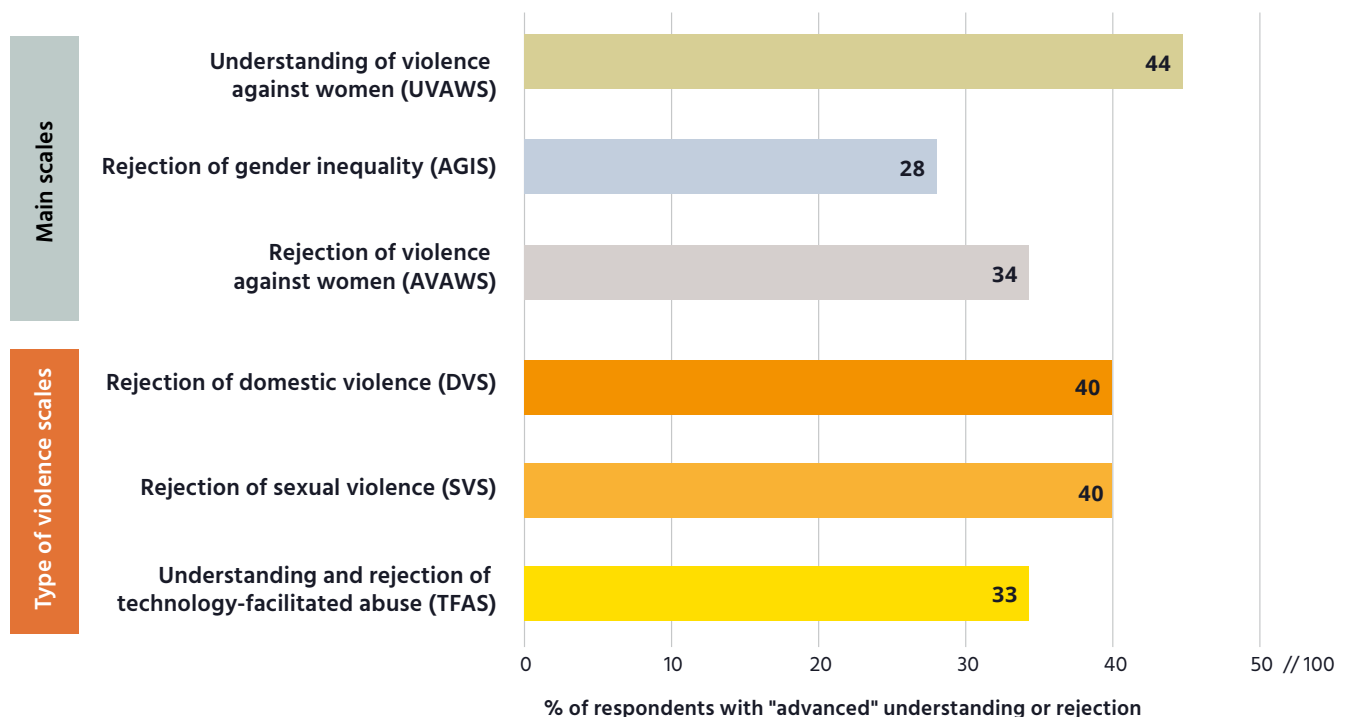
\* Statistically significant difference on this scale between the year indicated and 2021.

## 3.2 Understanding and attitudes in 2021

There is still substantial work to be done to improve community understanding and attitudes regarding violence against women and gender inequality in Australia. As Figure 3-5 shows, in 2021, a minority of respondents (28–44%) demonstrated “advanced”:

- understanding of violence against women (UVAWS)
- rejection of gender inequality (AGIS)
- rejection of violence against women (AVAWS), including rejection of sexual violence (SVS) and domestic violence (DVS)
- understanding and rejection of technology-facilitated abuse (TFAS).

Figure 3-5: “Advanced” understanding of violence against women and rejection of problematic attitudes, 2021



**Note:**  $N = 19,100$ . “Advanced” understanding refers to answering “yes, always” the behaviour is violence to at least 75% of items and “yes, usually” to the remaining items (UVAWS). “Advanced” attitudes refer to answering “strongly disagree” to at least 75% of the items in the scale and “somewhat disagree” to the remaining items in the scale, which condoned gender inequality (AGIS), condoned violence (AVAWS), or condoned a type of violence (DVS, SVS). The “advanced” TFAS category means that the respondent answered “yes, always” the behaviour is violence or “strongly disagreed” with problematic attitudes for at least 75% of items, and answered the remaining items “yes, usually” or “somewhat disagree”. See *Technical report*, Chapter T13 for further details (Coumarelos et al., 2023).

### 3.3 Conclusion

For all NCAS scales, 2013 marked a turning point for understanding and rejection of violence against women and gender inequality. There was minimal change between 2009 and 2013, but significant changes between 2013 and 2021 on all NCAS scales. In addition, there were significant improvements since 2017 for understanding of violence against women (UVAWS), rejection of gender inequality (AGIS) and rejection of sexual violence (SVS). While causation cannot be inferred from these results, it is notable that these shifts occurred after the first National Plan was released in 2010 and the first woman prime minister held office between 2010 and 2013 (COAG, 2010a, 2010b; National Archives of Australia, 2022).

Attitudes towards violence against women (AVAWS) and attitudes towards domestic violence in particular (DVS) showed slower change over time, with no improvement in 2021 compared to 2017 despite improvement compared to earlier years. Nonetheless, the population's understanding of violence and their attitudes to both gender inequality and violence against women (according to all scales) were at a comparable level in 2021. However, there is considerable room to further enhance "advanced" understanding and attitudes across the Australian population, as fewer than half of all respondents demonstrated "advanced" understanding of violence against women and "advanced" rejection of gender inequality and violence against women.

The results suggest that continued, cohesive effort nationally is required at all levels of the social ecology to disrupt misconceptions and problematic attitudes that reflect broader norms, practices, systems and structures that are embedded throughout our society and facilitate and maintain violence against women (COAG, 2010b, 2022). Efforts need to include primary prevention and early intervention strategies because problematic attitudes are slow and difficult to shift. Violence against women needs to be recognised as a community-wide social problem that requires community-wide responsibility (see Chapter 10 for more details).



## 4 Findings: Understanding of Violence against Women Scale (UVAWS)

**Understanding of violence against women can influence both attitudes towards violence against women and prosocial behaviours to intervene when witnessing abuse or violence**

(Webster et al., 2018).

A strong understanding of violence against women, together with knowledge of the support and legal services available to victims and survivors, also facilitates reporting, help-seeking and recovery for victims and survivors (Gadd et al., 2003; Gracia et al., 2020; Harmer & Lewis, 2022; Paul et al., 2014). The NCAS measures Australians' understanding of violence against women, including domestic violence between partners, sexual violence and technology-facilitated abuse, via the Understanding of Violence against Women Scale (UVAWS).



## CHAPTER RESULTS SUMMARY

## Findings: Understanding of Violence against Women Scale (UVAWS)

- Australians' understanding of violence against women has significantly improved over time (Section 3.1).
- Women were significantly more likely than men to have "advanced" understanding of violence against women. Non-binary respondents had similar levels of understanding as women.
- Most respondents recognised that domestic violence and violence against women can manifest as a range of violent, abusive and controlling behaviours. However, respondents were more adept at identifying these behaviours than they were at understanding the gendered nature of domestic violence (Sections 4.1 and 4.3).
- Respondents' understanding of violence was significantly but not strongly related to their demographic characteristics, suggesting that other factors are important in shaping understanding of violence. There is room for improvement in understanding of violence against women across the Australian community (Section 4.4).

The UVAWS comprises three psychometrically validated subscales, each measuring a different conceptual aspect of understanding of violence against women:

- The **Recognise VAW Subscale** comprises four items that ask whether problematic behaviours are a form of violence against women on a four-point scale: "yes, always", "yes, usually", "yes, sometimes" and "no".
- The **Recognise DV Subscale** comprises 12 items that ask whether problematic behaviours are a form of domestic violence on a four-point scale: "yes, always", "yes, usually", "yes, sometimes", "no".
- The **Understand Gendered DV Subscale** comprises three items that examine understanding of the gendered nature of domestic violence by asking about who is more likely to perpetrate and experience fear and harm from domestic violence: "men", "women", or "both equally".

Higher scores on the UVAWS and its subscales indicate higher understanding of violence. Figure 4-1 shows understanding in 2021 by gender. In 2021, compared to men, women had significantly higher understanding of violence overall (UVAWS) and higher recognition of both violence against women (Recognise VAW Subscale) and domestic violence (Recognise DV Subscale). Non-binary respondents had similar mean scores to women (Figure 4-1).

### 4.1 UVAWS in focus: Recognise VAW Subscale

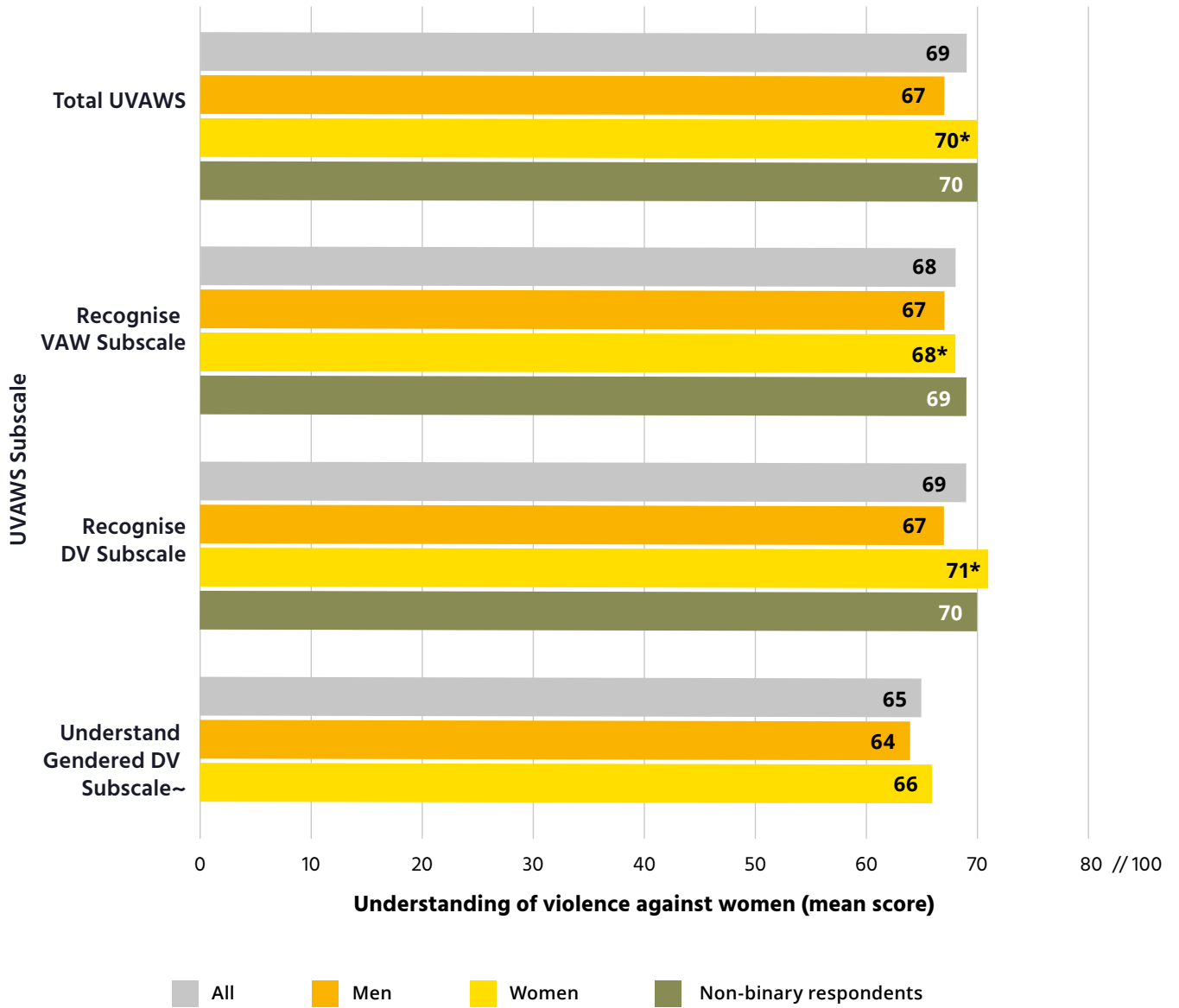
The four items in the Recognise VAW Subscale of the UVAWS examine understanding that certain behaviours are forms of violence against women. One item is about in-person stalking and three items are about technology-facilitated abuse.

Most respondents recognised these behaviours as "always" or "usually" forms of violence against women (80–89%; Figure 4-2). Although there is room to improve recognition of all these behaviours, in-person stalking was more often recognised as "always" a form of violence against women (V4; 78%) than the three forms of technology-facilitated abuse (V5, V6, V7; 68%). A sizeable minority of respondents thought that the technology-facilitated abuse behaviours are not, or are only sometimes, violence against women (V5, V6, V7; 15–18%).

Nonetheless, there was a significant improvement in recognition of violence against women in 2021 compared to previous NCAS waves, based on the Recognise VAW Subscale overall and items V4 and V5 (Figure 4-2).



Figure 4-1: Understanding of different aspects of violence against women (UVAWS and subscales) by gender, 2021

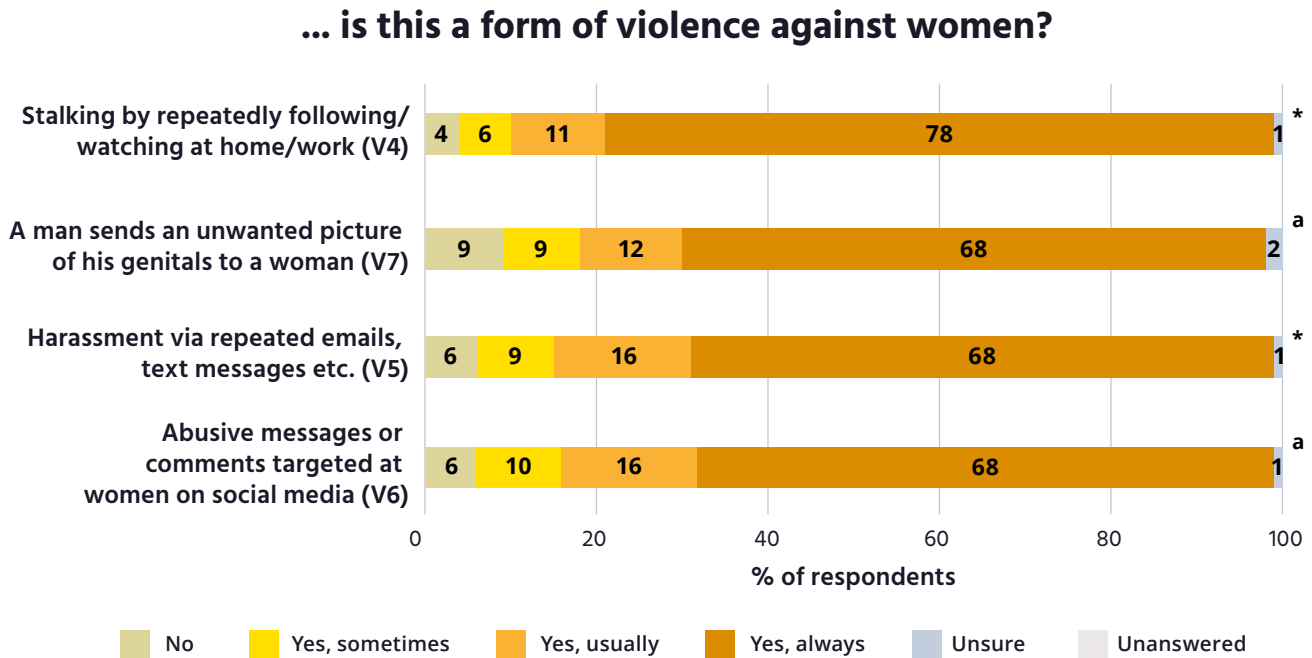


**Note:** N = 19,100 unless otherwise noted.

\* Statistically significant difference compared to men on the UVAWS or the subscale indicated.

~ Asked of one quarter of the sample. Results for non-binary respondents are not reported for this subscale due to insufficient numbers.

Figure 4-2: Recognising violence against women (UVAWS subscale items), 2021



**Note:** N = 19,100. Percentages in the figure do not always add to 100 or exactly correspond to percentages in the text due to rounding. Significant differences over time are based on the percentage of respondents who answered “yes” the behaviour is violence against women either “always” or “usually”.

**a** New item in 2021. Thus, change over time could not be examined.

\* Significantly higher understanding in 2021 than 2017.

## 4.2 UVAWS in focus: Recognise DV Subscale

The 12 items in the Recognise DV Subscale of the UVAWS examine the recognition of domestic violence between intimate partners, including recognition of both physical forms of violence and non-physical forms of domestic violence such as elements of coercive control.

In 2021, most respondents identified physical harm or threats of physical harm as “always” forms of violence (D2, D1, D12; 81–92%; Figure 4-3). However, fewer respondents recognised emotional abuse (D3); coercive controlling behaviours that target an aspect of the partner’s identity, beliefs or experience (D11, D7, D10); and financial abuse (D5) as “always” domestic violence (66–67%).

There was a significant improvement in recognition of domestic violence behaviours in 2021 compared to previous NCAS waves based on the Recognise DV Subscale overall. However, only two of the six items included in both 2017 and 2021 showed significant improvement over this period (D5, D6; Figure 4-3).

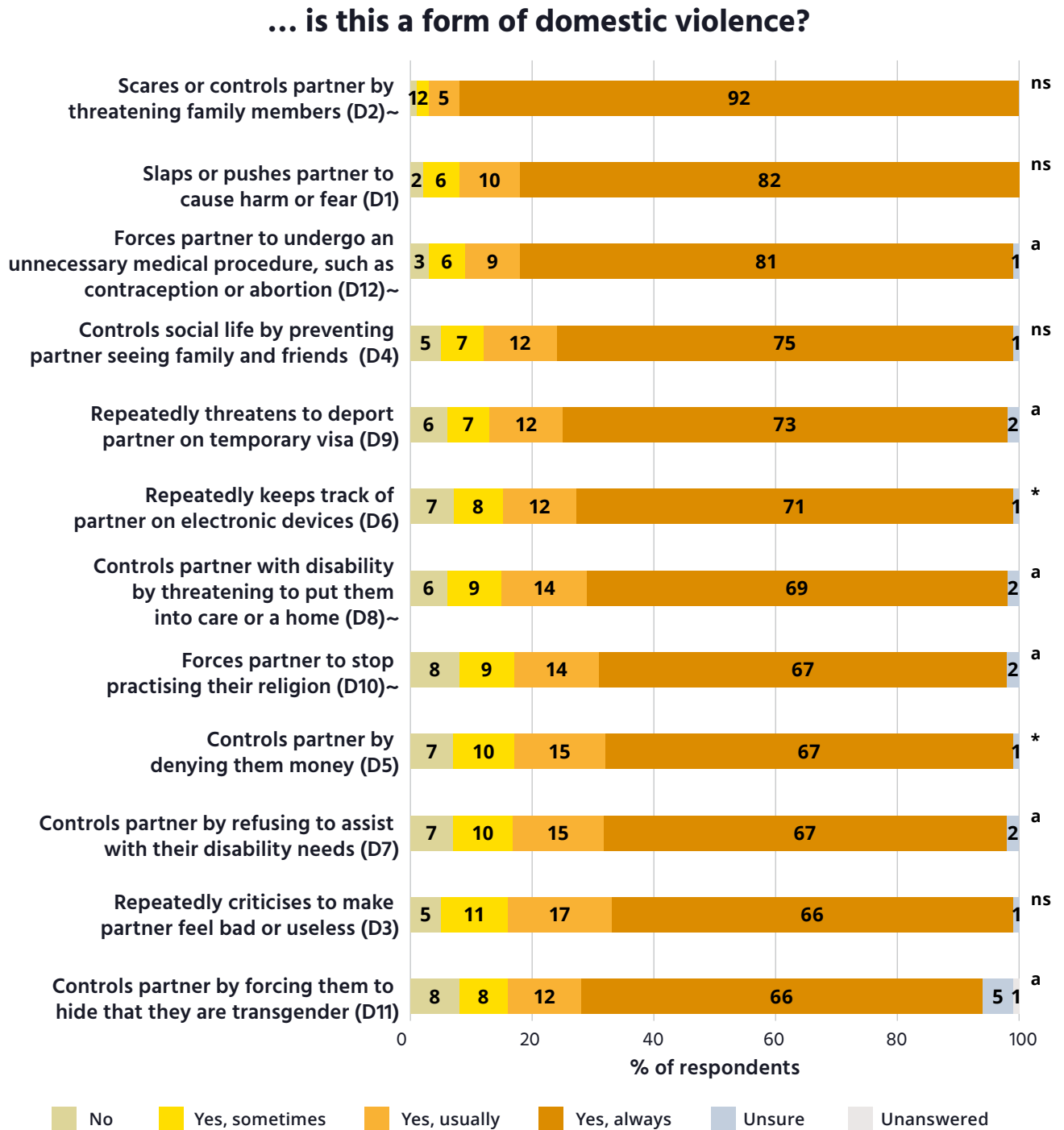
## 4.3 UVAWS in focus: Understand Gendered DV Subscale

The three items in the Understand Gendered DV Subscale of the UVAWS examine understanding of the gendered nature of domestic violence whereby men are more likely to commit domestic violence and women are more likely to experience domestic violence.

In 2021, a substantial proportion of respondents incorrectly believed that women and men are equally likely to commit domestic violence (D13; 41%) and equally likely to suffer physical harm (D14; 21%) and fear (D15; 28%) as a result of domestic violence (Figures 4-4 and 4-5).

There was significantly lower understanding of the gendered nature of domestic violence in 2021 compared to 2009 and 2013. However, there was no further significant decline in this understanding between 2017 and 2021 based on the two items that were included in both 2017 and 2021 (D13, D14; Figure 4-4).

Figure 4-3: Recognising domestic violence (UVAWS subscale items), 2021



**Note:** N = 19,100 unless otherwise noted. Percentages in the figure do not always exactly correspond to percentages in the text due to rounding. Significant differences over time are based on the percentage of respondents who answered “yes” the behaviour is violence against women either “always” or “usually”.

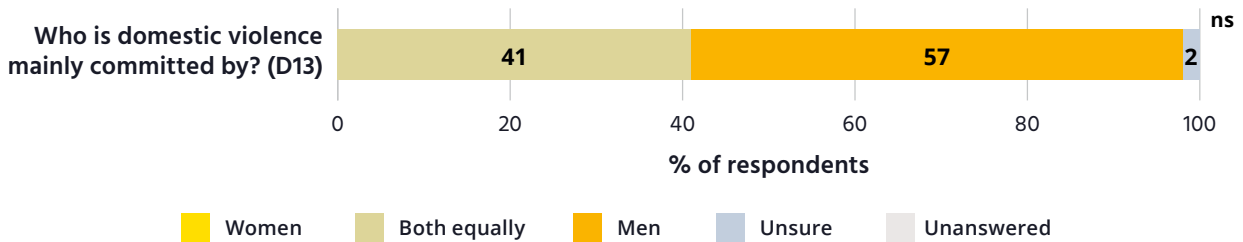
**ns** No significant difference between 2021 and 2017.

**a** New item in 2021. Thus, change over time could not be examined.

**\*** Significantly higher understanding in 2021 than 2017.

~ Asked of one quarter of the sample.

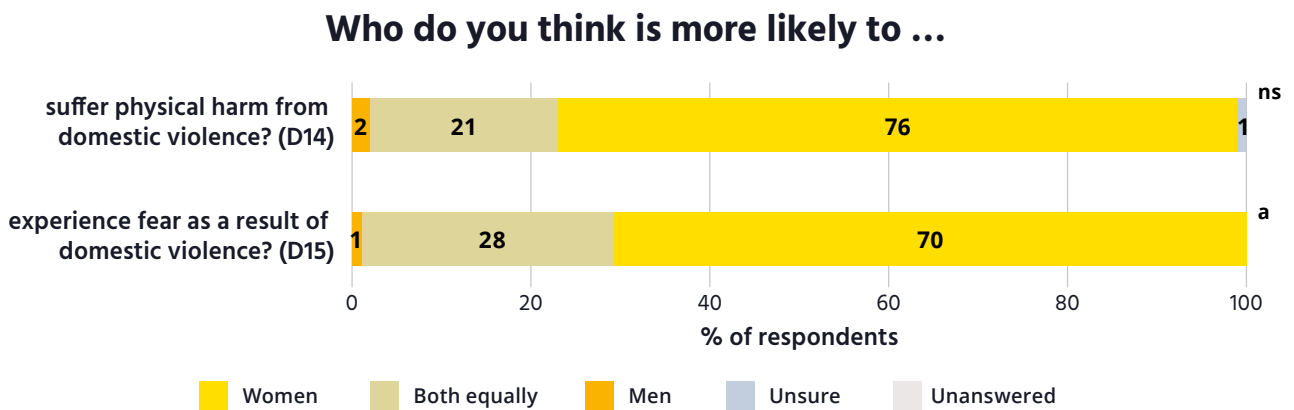
Figure 4-4: Understanding the gendered nature of domestic violence perpetration (UVAWS subscale items), 2021



Note: N = 4,777. "Men" is the correct answer according to empirical evidence from police and court data (Hulme et al., 2019). Asked of one quarter of the sample in 2021.

ns No significant difference between 2017 and 2021.

Figure 4-5: Understanding the gendered nature of domestic violence impacts (UVAWS subscale items), 2021



Note: N = 4,777. "Women" is the correct answer according to empirical evidence from the Personal Safety Survey (PSS; ABS, 2017). Percentages in the figure do not always add to 100 due to rounding. Asked of one quarter of the sample in 2021.

ns No significant difference between 2017 and 2021.

a Revised item in 2021. Thus, change over time could not be examined.

## 4.4 Assessing the importance of demographics

Efforts to improve community understanding of violence against women are aided by information about the factors that are associated with an individual's understanding. Based on multiple regression analysis, demographic factors explained 7 per cent of the difference in people's understanding of violence against women. Gender was the most important demographic predictor and explained 2 per cent of the variance (see Chapter 9 for more details). Thus, most of the difference in respondents' understanding of violence against women (93%) cannot be explained by their demographic characteristics alone, suggesting other factors are also important in predicting or shaping understanding.



# 5 Findings: Attitudes towards Gender Inequality Scale (AGIS)

**Gender inequality remains a pervasive issue in Australia and addressing gender inequality is critical if we are to end violence against women** (AIHW, 2016; COAG, 2010b, 2022; Our Watch, 2021; Riach et al., 2018; WGEA, 2022).

“Reduction of attitudes that are associated with gender inequality” is a key indicator for preventing violence according to the National Plan 2022–2032 (COAG, 2022, p. 30). The NCAS measures Australians’ attitudes towards gender inequality via the Attitudes towards Gender Inequality Scale (AGIS).





## CHAPTER RESULTS SUMMARY

## Attitudes towards Gender Inequality Scale (AGIS)

- Australians' attitudinal rejection of gender inequality continues to improve significantly but slowly over time (Section 3.1). Non-binary respondents and women were significantly more likely than men to have "advanced" attitudinal rejection of gender inequality in 2021.
- While most respondents held attitudes that reject gender inequality, a minority condoned certain attitudes that reinforce rigid gender roles in specific areas, undermine women's leadership, limit women's personal autonomy, normalise sexism and deny that gender inequality is a problem (Sections 5.1 to 5.5).
- Respondents' attitudes towards gender inequality were significantly but not strongly related to their level of understanding of violence against women and their demographic characteristics, suggesting other factors are also important in shaping attitudes towards gender inequality. There is room to improve attitudes towards gender inequality across the Australian community (Section 5.6).

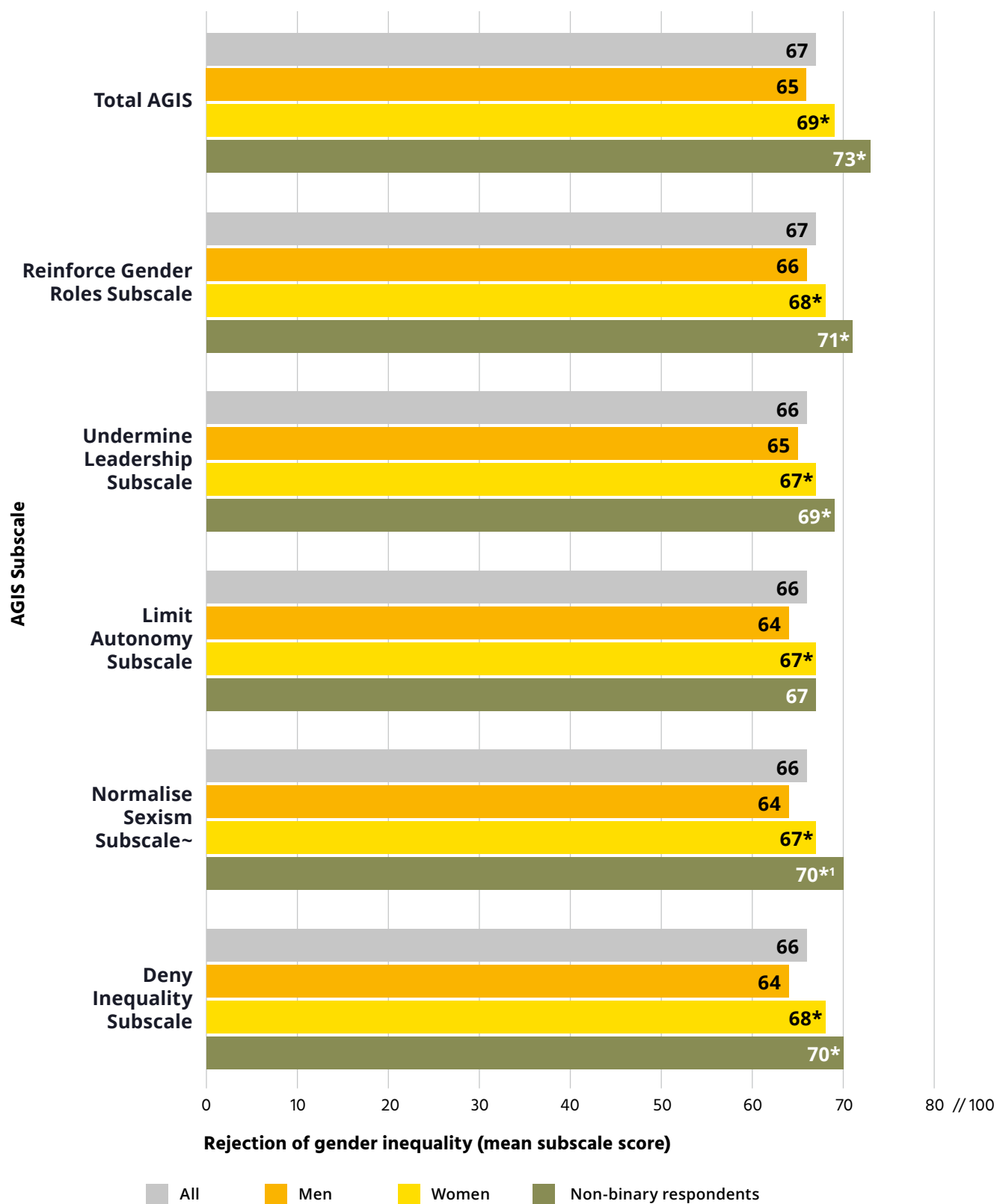
The AGIS comprises five psychometrically validated subscales, each measuring a different conceptual aspect of attitudes towards gender inequality, and asking respondents to agree or disagree with statements on a five-point scale: "Strongly agree", "Somewhat agree", "Neither agree or disagree", "Somewhat disagree", "Strongly disagree":

- The **Reinforce Gender Roles Subscale** comprises five statements that reinforce traditional, rigid gender roles and expectations.
- The **Undermine Leadership Subscale** comprises four statements that undermine women's leadership in work and public life.
- The **Limit Autonomy Subscale** comprises two statements that condone men being in charge in intimate relationships and limit women's personal autonomy.
- The **Normalise Sexism Subscale** comprises three statements that downplay or normalise sexism.
- The **Deny Inequality Subscale** comprises three statements that deny that gender inequality is experienced by women, suggesting "backlash" or resistance to gender equality.

Higher mean scores on the AGIS and its subscales indicate higher rejection of the problematic attitudes towards gender inequality. In 2021, compared to men, women demonstrated significantly higher rejection of gender inequality overall (AGIS) and of the aspects of gender inequality measured by all five AGIS subscales: that is, higher rejection of attitudes that reinforce rigid gender roles, undermine leadership, limit autonomy, normalise sexism and deny inequality (Figure 5-1). Non-binary respondents demonstrated significantly higher rejection of gender inequality overall (AGIS) compared to both men and women. Non-binary respondents also demonstrated significantly higher rejection of the aspects of gender inequality measured by four of the five AGIS subscales, showing higher rejection on:

- the Reinforce Gender Roles, Undermine Leadership and Deny Inequality Subscales compared to men
- the Normalise Sexism Subscale compared to both men and women (Figure 5-1).

Figure 5-1: Rejection of different aspects of gender inequality (AGIS and subscales) by gender, 2021



**Note:**  $N = 19,100$  unless otherwise noted.

\* Statistically significant difference compared to men on the AGIS or subscale indicated in 2021.

\*1 Statistically significant difference compared to men and women on the AGIS or subscale indicated in 2021.

~ Asked of one quarter of the sample.

## 5.1 AGIS in focus: Reinforce Gender Roles Subscale

The Reinforce Gender Roles Subscale of the AGIS includes five items examining attitudes to traditional, rigid and heteronormative gender roles and expectations. Disagreement with an item indicates rejection of attitudes that support rigid gender roles and stereotypes (Figure 5-2).

In 2021, most respondents “strongly disagreed” with attitudes that chastise men for working in stereotypically “feminine” industries and for expressing emotion (G7, G8; 78–80%). However, fewer respondents “strongly disagreed” with expectations that women should not initiate sex when a couple starts dating (G15; 59%).

There was a significant improvement in the rejection of rigid gender roles in 2021 compared to previous NCAS waves based on the Reinforce Gender Roles Subscale overall. However, there was no significant improvement for any of the individual items in this subscale between 2017 and 2021 (Figure 5-2).

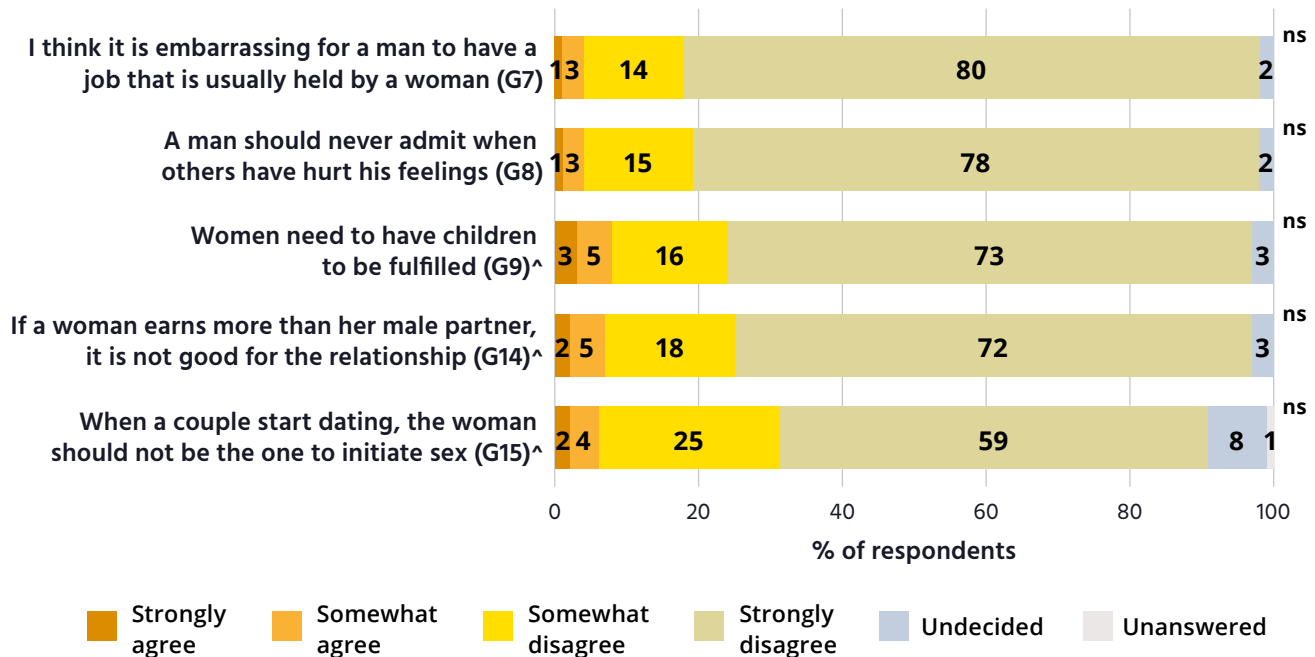
## 5.2 AGIS in focus: Undermine Leadership Subscale

The Undermine Leadership Subscale of the AGIS includes four items relating to attitudes towards women in work and leadership.

In 2021, most respondents “strongly disagreed” with attitudes that undermine women’s leadership and decision-making abilities, including attitudes that women are less capable of thinking logically than men (G11; 83%). However, fewer respondents “strongly disagreed” that men generally make better bosses (G5) and political leaders (G4) than women (65–68%; Figure 5-3).

There was no significant improvement between 2017 and 2021 for the Undermine Leadership Subscale overall, and none of the individual items showed improvement since 2017 (Figure 5-3). These findings indicate that the Australian population’s fairly high level of rejection of attitudes that undermine women’s leadership evidenced in 2021 was similar to that demonstrated in 2017.

Figure 5-2: Reinforcing rigid gender roles (AGIS subscale items), 2021



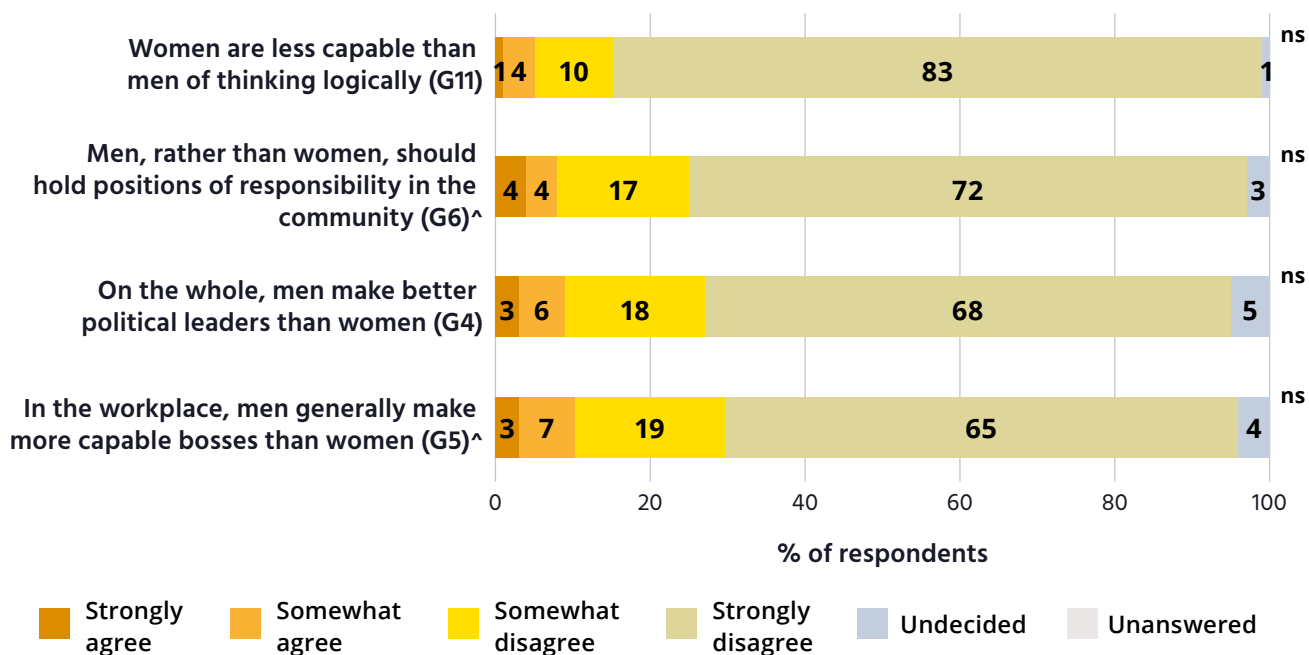
**Note:** N = 19,100 unless otherwise noted. Significant differences over time are based on the percentage of respondents who answered “strongly disagree” or “somewhat disagree”.

**ns** No significant difference between 2017 and 2021.

^ Asked of half the sample.



Figure 5-3: Undermining women’s leadership in public life (AGIS subscale items), 2021



Note: N = 19,100 unless otherwise noted.

ns No significant difference between 2017 and 2021.

^ Asked of half of the sample.

### 5.3 AGIS in focus: Limit Autonomy Subscale

The Limit Autonomy Subscale of the AGIS includes two items that examine attitudes to men being in charge or taking control in their intimate relationships with women (Figure 5-4).

In 2021, most respondents strongly or somewhat disagreed with the normative statement that men *should* be in charge of relationships (G12; 87%). However, fewer respondents strongly or somewhat disagreed that women prefer men to take charge in relationships (G13; 74%).

Scores on the Limit Autonomy Subscale improved significantly in 2021 compared to previous NCAS waves. While both subscale items showed a significant increase between 2013 and 2021 in the rejection of attitudes that limit women's personal autonomy in relationships, there was no significant improvement in these attitudes between 2017 and 2021 (Figure 5-4).

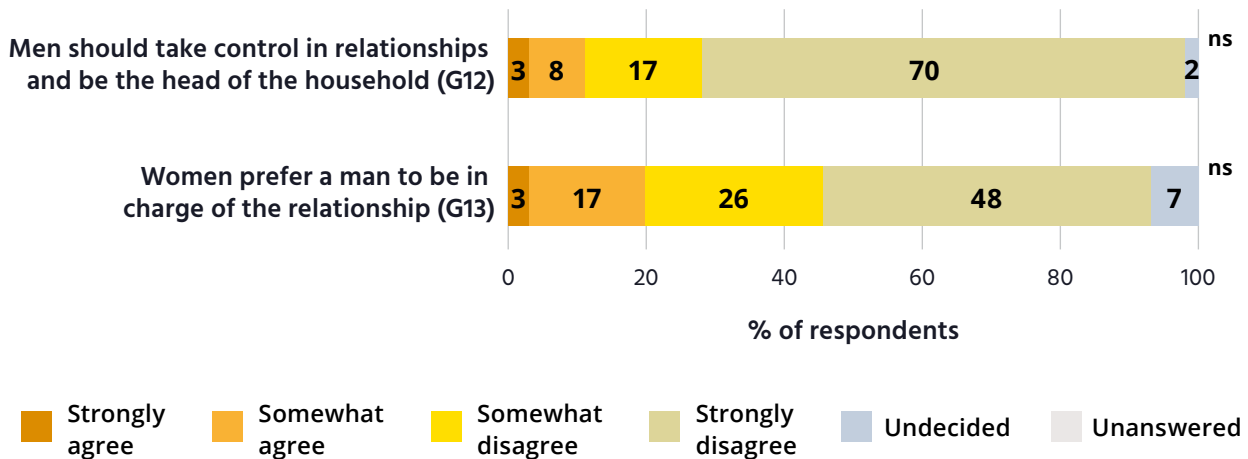
### 5.4 AGIS in focus: Normalise Sexism Subscale

The Normalise Sexism Subscale of the AGIS includes three items describing attitudes that downplay or normalise sexism in specific social contexts (Figure 5-5).

In 2021, most respondents strongly disagreed that jokes about violence against women are acceptable (G17; 93%). However, fewer respondents strongly disagreed that sexist jokes are acceptable (G16; 57%) and that workplace discrimination against women is not a problem (G10; 66%).

There was a significant increase in the rejection of attitudes that normalise sexism in 2021 compared to previous NCAS waves based on the Normalise Sexism Subscale overall. However, only one of the three items showed significant improvement between 2017 and 2021 (G16; Figure 5-5).

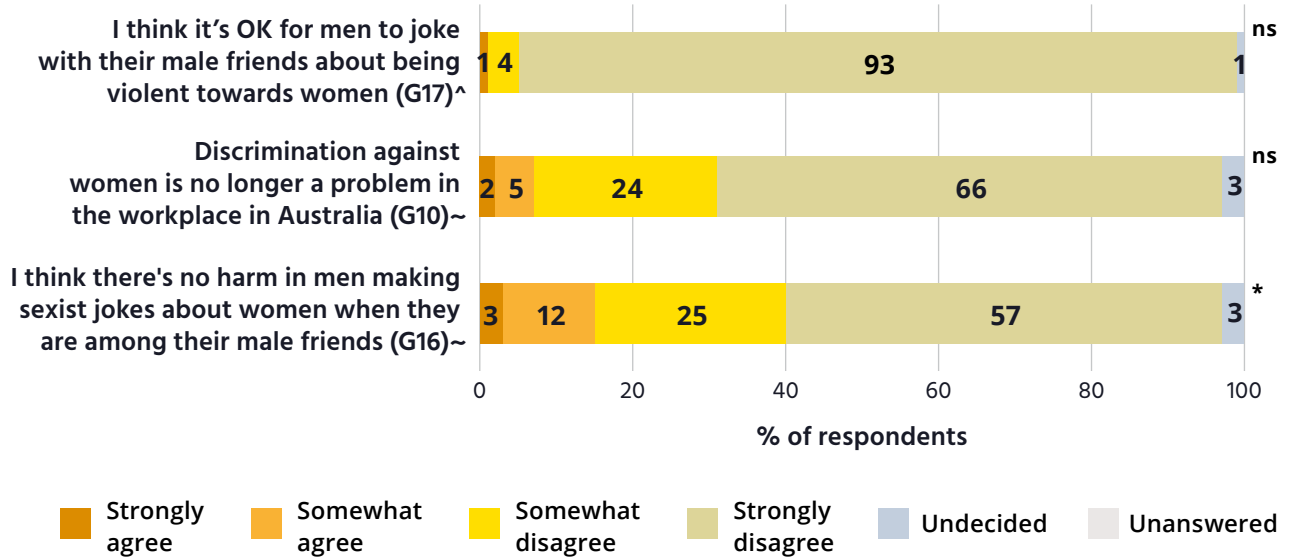
Figure 5-4: Limiting women's personal autonomy in relationships (AGIS subscale items), 2021



Note: N = 19,100.

ns No significant difference between 2017 and 2021.

Figure 5-5: Normalising sexism (AGIS subscale items), 2021



**Note:** N = 19,100 unless otherwise noted. Percentages in the figure do not always exactly correspond to percentages in the text due to rounding. Significant differences over time are based on the percentage of respondents who answered “strongly disagree” or “somewhat disagree”.

**ns** No significant difference between 2017 and 2021.

\* Significantly higher understanding in 2021 than 2017.

~ Asked of one quarter of the sample.

^ Asked of half of the sample.

## 5.5 AGIS in focus: Deny Inequality Subscale

The Deny Inequality Subscale of the AGIS comprises three items describing attitudes that deny gender inequality experiences through backlash.

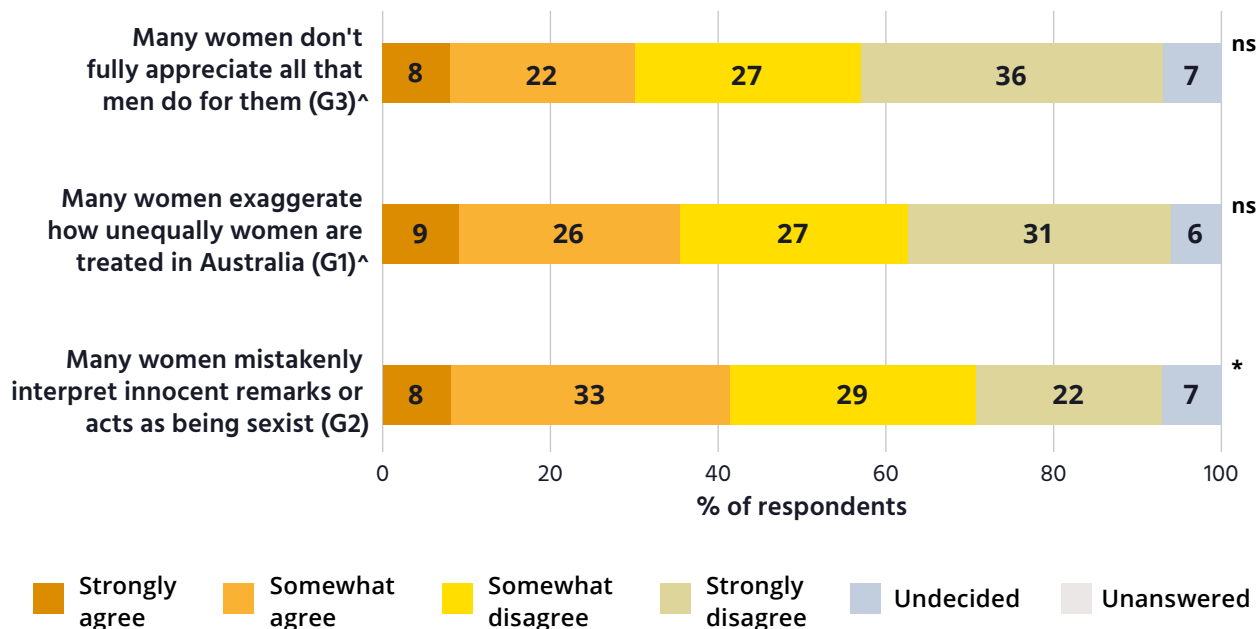
In 2021, a substantial proportion of respondents strongly or somewhat agreed that many women mistakenly interpret innocent remarks as sexist (G2; 41%), that women exaggerate the unequal treatment of women in Australia (G1; 35%), and that women do not fully appreciate what men do for them (G3; 30%; Figure 5-6). These results indicate considerable support for backlash attitudes within the Australian community.

There was a significant improvement in attitudes which deny gender equality experiences in 2021 compared to 2017, based on the Deny Inequality Subscale overall. However, only one of the three items showed significant improvement between 2017 and 2021 (G2; Figure 5-6).

## 5.6 Assessing the importance of demographics and understanding

Based on multiple regression analysis, demographic factors and understanding of violence against women each explained almost one fifth (18%; 19%) of the difference in people’s attitudes towards gender inequality. Gender was the most important demographic predictor and explained 5 per cent of the variance (see Chapter 9 for more details). Thus, most of the difference in respondents’ attitudes towards gender inequality cannot be explained based only on their demographic characteristics and understanding of violence, suggesting other factors are also important in predicting or shaping these attitudes.

Figure 5-6: Denying gender inequality experiences (AGIS subscale items), 2021



**Note:** N = 19,100 unless otherwise noted. Percentages in the figure do not always exactly correspond to percentages in the text due to rounding. Significant differences over time are based on the percentage of respondents who answered “strongly disagree” or “somewhat disagree”.

**ns** No significant difference between 2017 and 2021.

\* Significantly higher understanding in 2021 than 2017.

<sup>^</sup> Asked of half the sample.



# 6 Findings: Attitudes towards Violence against Women Scale (AVAWS)

**The AVAWS measures Australians' attitudes towards violence against women and provides a means of monitoring changes over time in community attitudes that reject violence.**

“Reduction of attitudes that are associated with violence against women” is cited in the National Plan 2022–2032 as a key (primary) prevention indicator (COAG, 2022, p. 30).





## CHAPTER RESULTS SUMMARY

## Attitudes towards Violence against Women Scale (AVAWS)

- Australians mostly hold attitudes that reject violence against women and this rejection has significantly improved since 2013. However, there was no significant improvement in overall attitudes towards violence against women between 2017 and 2021, largely reflecting a plateauing of attitudinal rejection of domestic violence despite an improvement in attitudinal rejection of sexual violence since 2017 (Section 3.1).
- Non-binary respondents and women were significantly more likely than men to have “advanced” attitudinal rejection of violence against women.
- A minority of respondents endorsed attitudes that condone violence against women, including attitudes that minimise the seriousness of violence and shift blame to victims and survivors, attitudes that mistrust women’s reports of violence, and attitudes that objectify women and disregard consent (Sections 6.1 to 6.3).
- Respondents’ attitudes towards violence against women were significantly and closely related to their attitudes towards gender inequality, and significantly, but less strongly, related to their level of understanding of violence against women and their demographic characteristics (Section 6.4). There is room to further improve attitudes towards violence against women across the Australian community (Section 6.4).

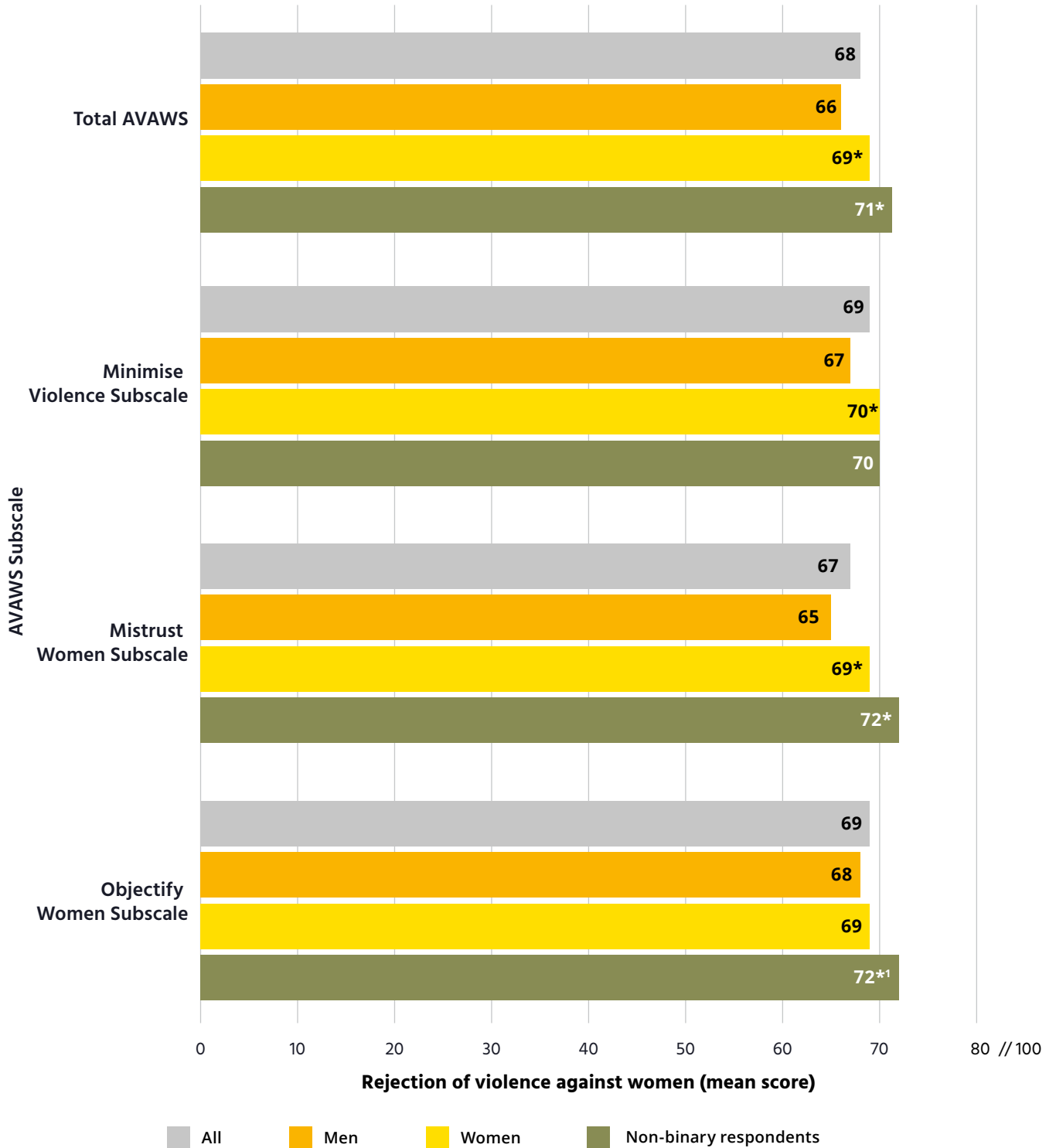
The AVAWS comprises three psychometrically validated subscales, each measuring a different conceptual aspect of attitudes towards violence against women. Respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree with attitudes that support violence on a five-point scale: “Strongly agree”, “Somewhat agree”, “Neither agree or disagree”, “Somewhat disagree”, “Strongly disagree”:

- The **Minimise Violence Subscale** comprises 15 statements that minimise the seriousness of violence against women and shift blame from perpetrators to victims and survivors.
- The **Mistrust Women Subscale** comprises 13 statements that mistrust women’s reports of violence.
- The **Objectify Women Subscale** comprises 15 statements that objectify women or disregard the need to gain women’s consent.

Higher mean scores on the AVAWS and its subscales indicate higher rejection of problematic attitudes towards violence against women. In 2021, compared to men, women demonstrated significantly higher rejection of violence against women overall (AVAWS) and significantly higher rejection of the attitudes measured by two of the three AVAWS subscales: attitudes that minimise violence and attitudes that mistrust women’s reports of violence. Non-binary respondents demonstrated significantly higher rejection of violence against women overall (AVAWS) compared to men. Non-binary respondents also demonstrated significantly higher rejection of violence against women on two of the three AVAWS subscales, showing higher rejection of:

- attitudes that mistrust women’s reports of violence, compared to men
- attitudes that objectify women and disregard consent, compared to both men and women (Figure 6-1).

Figure 6-1: Rejection of different aspects of violence against women (AVAWS and subscales) by gender, 2021



Note: N = 19,100.

\* Statistically significant difference compared to men on the AVAWS or subscale indicated in 2021.

\*1 Statistically significant difference compared to men and women on the AVAWS or subscale indicated in 2021.

## 6.1 AVAWS in focus: Minimise Violence Subscale

The Minimise Violence Subscale of the AVAWS comprises 15 items examining the attitudinal concept of minimising violence against women and shifting blame from the perpetrator to the victim and survivor. This subscale consists almost entirely of items about domestic violence (12 items), but also includes two items about sexual violence and one item about violence against women more generally.

In 2021, most respondents disagreed, either strongly or somewhat, with attitudes that minimise violence and shift blame from perpetrators to victims and survivors (74-97%; Figure 6-2). Nonetheless, the results suggest that further positive shifts could be made in some of these attitudes that minimise violence, particularly attitudes that position violence as simply a reaction to day-to-day stress (D17; 74%) and attitudes that women cause their own victimisation by making their partner angry (D25; 78%).

There was no significant improvement in the rejection of minimising attitudes in 2021 compared to 2017. However, there were significant improvements in the Minimise Violence Subscale mean score in 2021 compared to 2009 and 2013. Similarly, while there was no significant improvement in any of the subscale items between 2017 and 2021 (Figure 6-2), four of these items improved significantly in 2021 compared to either 2013, 2009 or both (D24, S9, D18, D19).

## 6.2 AVAWS in focus: Mistrust Women Subscale

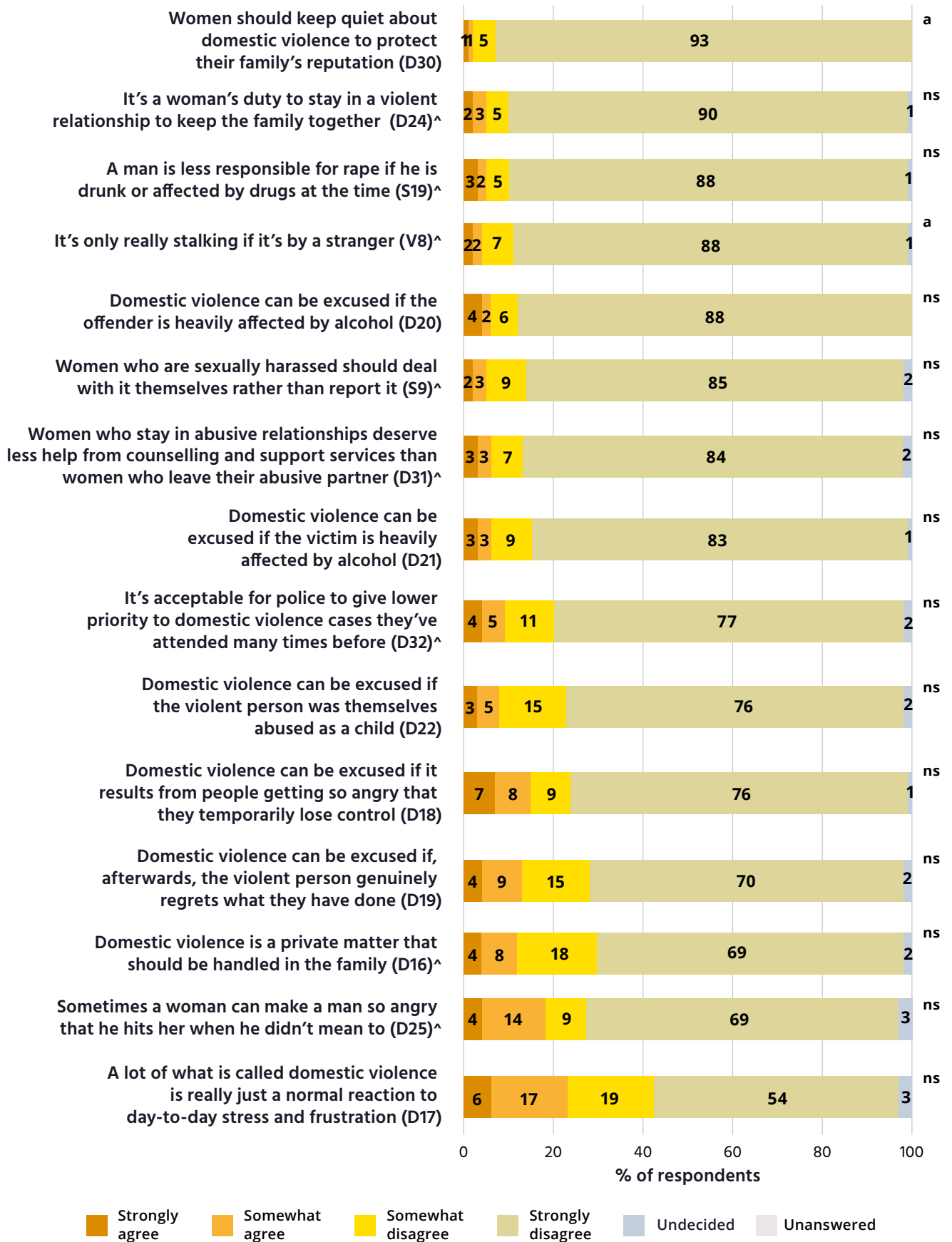
The Mistrust Women Subscale of the AVAWS comprises 13 items focusing on the attitudinal concept of mistrusting women's reports of violence victimisation (Figure 6-3). This subscale comprises eight items about sexual violence, four about domestic violence and one about violence against women more generally.

In 2021, with the exception of one item (D23; 47%), the majority of respondents disagreed, either somewhat or strongly, with attitudes that mistrust women's reports of violence (57-93%). Levels of disagreement were highest for attitudes that women's claims of violence should not be taken seriously (S2, S22, D27; 88-93%) and attitudes that women who delay reporting are lying (S10, S25; 90%). Nonetheless, considerable proportions of respondents (23-37%) strongly or somewhat agreed that women lie about domestic violence to gain an advantage in a custody battle (D23); women lie about sexual assault to "get back at men" (S23) or due to regretting consensual sex (S24); and women exaggerate the extent of men's violence (V3). These findings indicate that much work is still needed to challenge deep-seated mistrusting attitudes that women have malicious agendas and ulterior motives when disclosing their experiences of violence.

Consistent with the significant increase in overall rejection of attitudes that mistrust women's reports of violence between 2017 and 2021 according to the Mistrust Subscale, two Mistrust items also showed significant improvement over this period (D23, S24; Figure 6-3).



Figure 6-2: Minimising violence against women and shifting blame (AVAWS subscale items), 2021



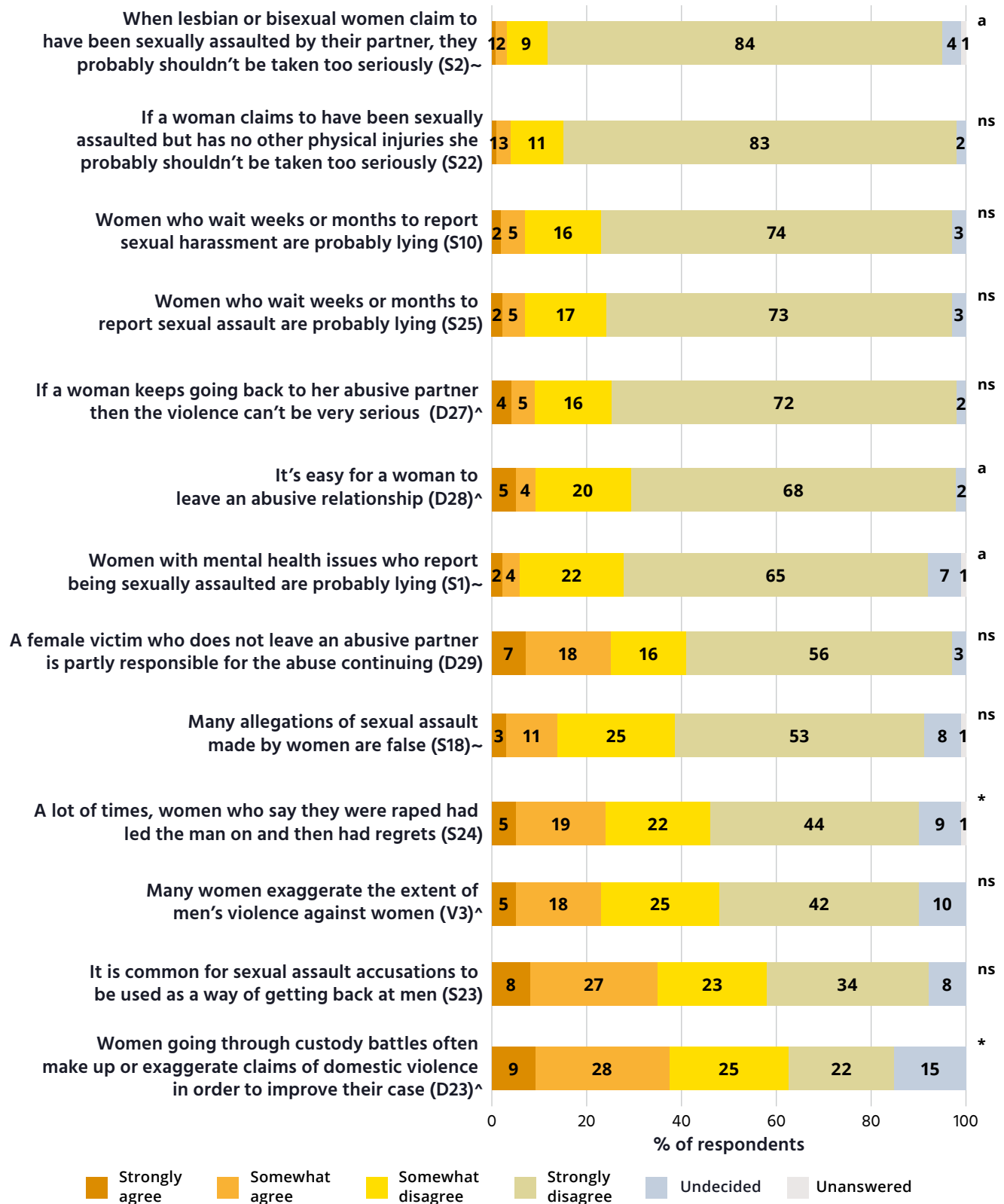
**Note:** N = 19,100 unless otherwise noted. Percentages in the figure do not always add to 100 or exactly correspond to percentages in the text due to rounding.

**ns** No significant difference between 2017 and 2021.

**a** New item in 2021. Thus, change over time could not be examined.

**^** Asked of half of the sample.

Figure 6-3: Mistrusting women’s reports of violence (AVAWS subscale items), 2021



**Note:** N = 19,100 unless otherwise noted. Percentages in the figure do not always add to 100 or exactly correspond to percentages in the text due to rounding. Significant differences over time are based on the percentage of respondents who answered “strongly disagree” or “somewhat disagree”.  
**ns** No significant difference between 2017 and 2021.  
**a** New item in 2021. Thus, change over time could not be examined.  
 \* Significantly higher understanding in 2021 than 2017.  
 ~ Asked of one quarter of the sample.  
 ^ Asked of half of the sample.

### 6.3 AVAWS in focus: Objectify Women Subscale

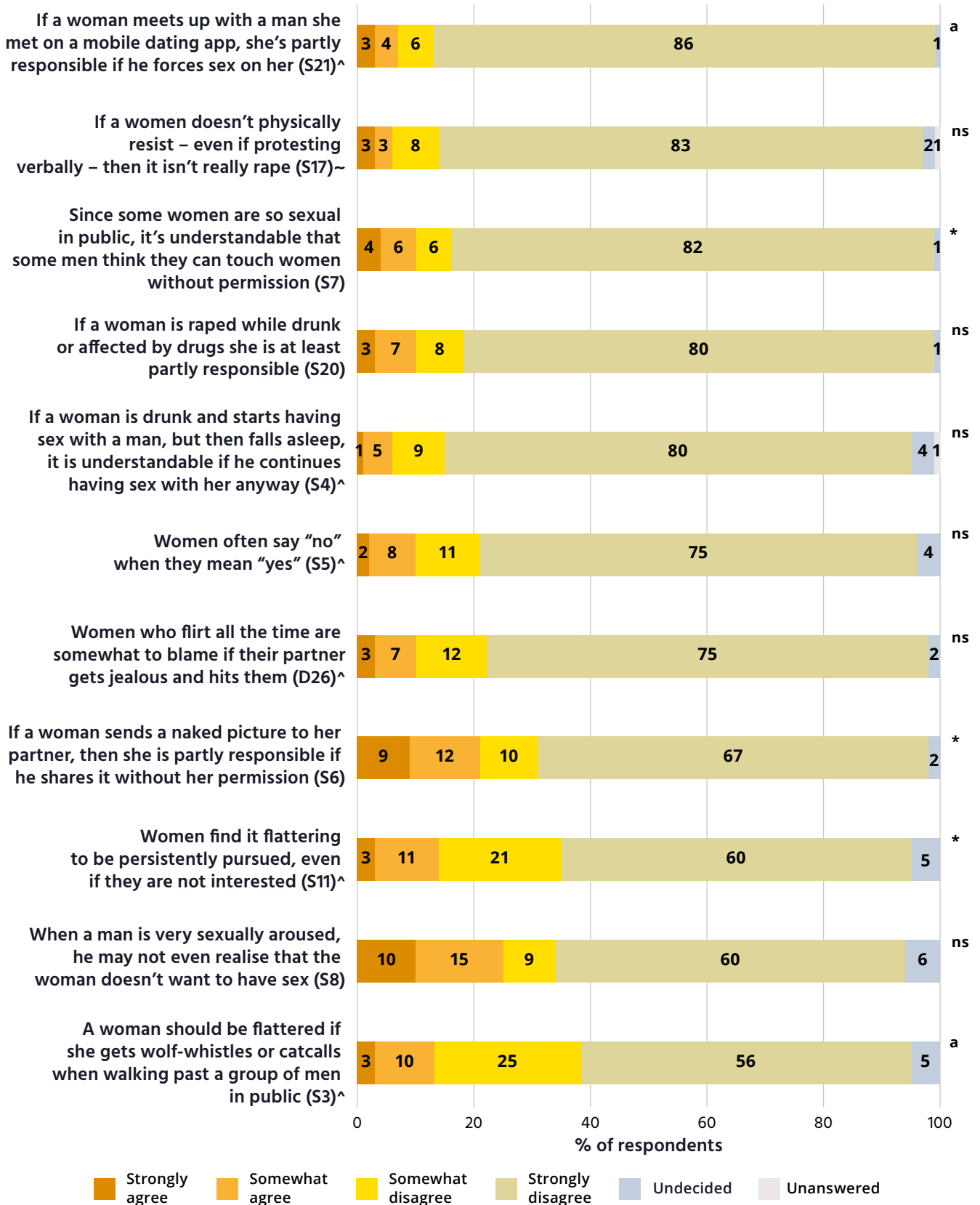
The Objectify Women Subscale of the AVAWS comprises 15 items, including 11 standalone items (Figure 6-4) and four items concerning two scenarios about sexual consent (Figure 6-5 and 6-6). All the items and scenarios in this subscale examine sexual violence, except for one item about domestic violence.

In 2021, most respondents either strongly or somewhat disagreed (69–92%) with each of the 11 standalone items in the Objectify Women Subscale. In particular, the highest level of rejection was for the items relating to rape or forced sexual touching, with around 9 in 10 respondents strongly or somewhat disagreeing with these attitudes (S21, S17, S7, S20, S4). However, a minority of respondents strongly or somewhat agreed with attitudes that reduce women to sexual objects (S3, S11; 13%) or show an indifference to gaining active consent (S6, S8; 21–25%).

In addition to the standalone items, the Objectify Women Subscale also included two scenarios about sexual consent, one about a married couple and the other about a couple who had just met at a party. The overwhelming majority of respondents strongly or somewhat disagreed that the man in each scenario was justified in forcing sex when he had initiated intimacy (94% for the married scenario; 96% for the acquaintance scenario). However, for both scenarios, fewer respondents strongly or somewhat disagreed that forced sex was justified when the woman had initiated intimacy (83% for the married scenario; 88% for the acquaintance scenario).

There was a significant improvement in the overall rejection of attitudes that objectify women and disregard consent between 2017 and 2021 based on the Objectify Women Subscale. However, only three standalone items significantly improved in this period (S11, S7, S6; Figure 6-4). There was no significant improvement in the two scenarios about sexual consent.

Figure 6-4: Objectifying women and disregarding consent (AVAWS subscale items), 2021



**Note:** N = 19,100 unless otherwise noted. Percentages in the figure do not always add to 100 or exactly correspond to percentages in the text due to rounding.

**ns** No significant difference between 2017 and 2021.

**a** New item in 2021. Thus, change over time could not be examined.

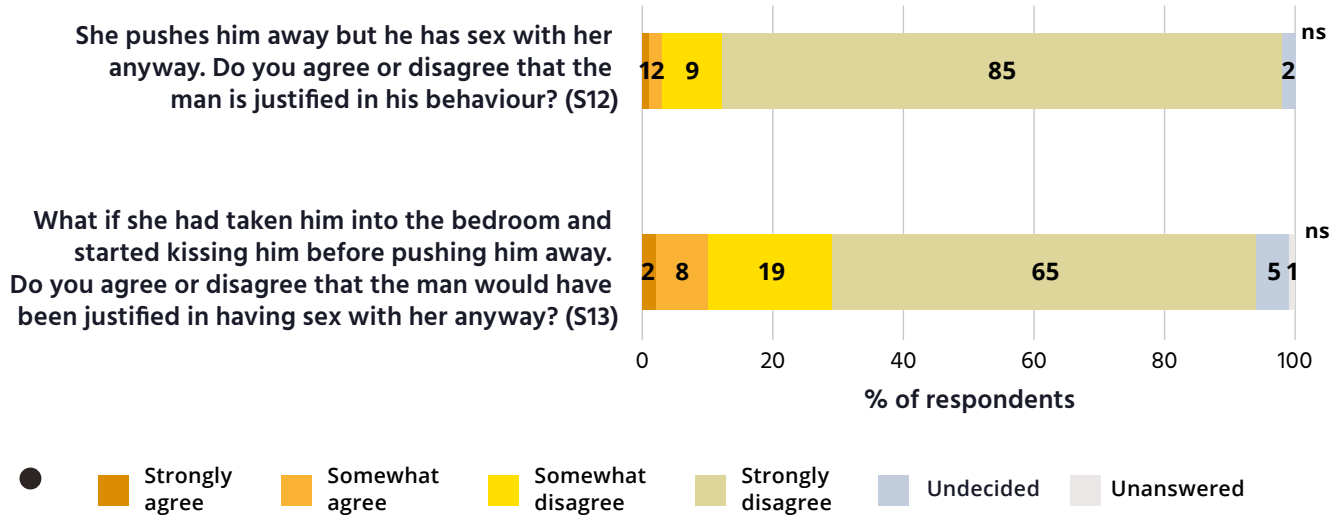
\* Significantly higher understanding in 2021 than 2017.

~ Asked of one quarter of the sample.

^ Asked of half the sample.

Figure 6-5: Sexual consent scenario (AVAWS Objectify Women Subscale items), married couple variation, 2021

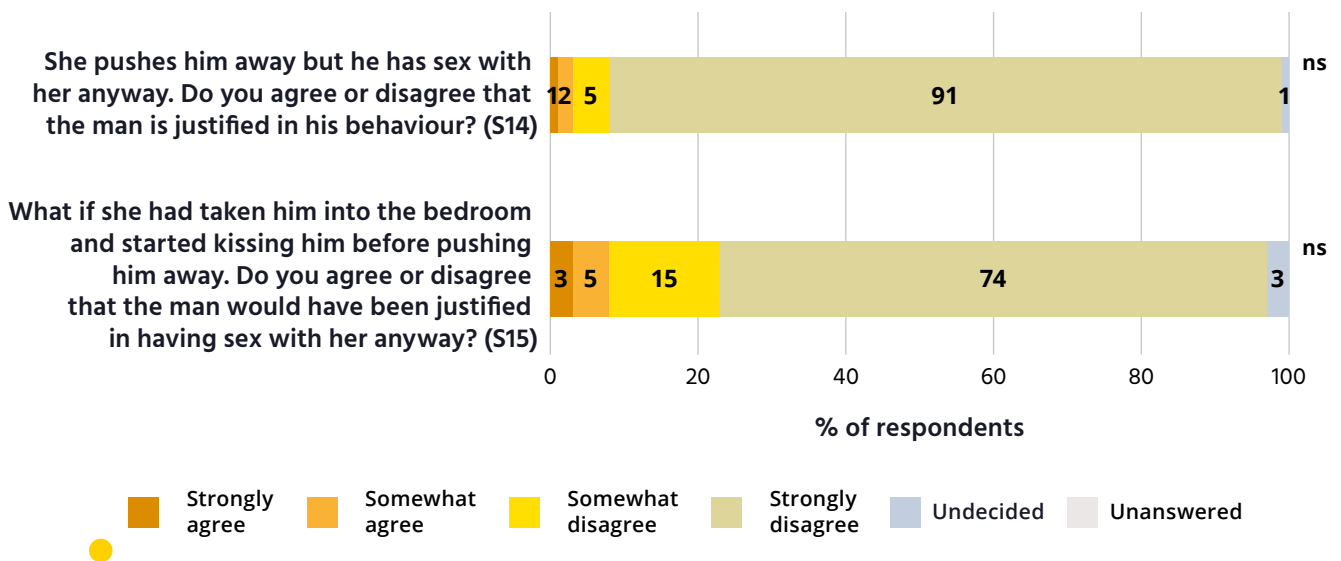
### After coming home from a party, a man kisses his wife and tries to have sex with her ...



**Note:** N = 4,640. Percentages in the figure do not always add to 100 or exactly correspond to percentages in the text due to rounding. Asked of one quarter of the sample in 2021.  
**ns** No significant difference between 2017 and 2021.

Figure 6-6: Sexual consent scenario (AVAWS Objectify Women Subscale items), acquaintance variation, 2021

### A man and woman have just met at a party and get on well. They go back to the woman's home where he kisses her and tries to have sex with her ...



**Note:** N = 4,661. Asked of one quarter of the sample in 2021.  
**ns** No significant difference between 2017 and 2021.

## **6.4 Assessing the importance of demographics, understanding and attitudes**

Based on multiple regression analysis, attitudes towards gender inequality explained the largest portion (37%) of the difference in people's attitudes to violence against women; demographic factors explained 20 per cent; and understanding of violence against women explained 13 per cent. These findings confirm the important relationship between attitudes towards gender inequality and attitudes towards violence against women, and suggest that these attitudes need to be tackled together. The Deny Inequality Subscale of the AGIS was the most important subscale predictor and age was the most important demographic predictor (see Chapter 9 for more details). Thus, shifting attitudes that deny gender inequality experiences may be an important component of initiatives that aim to improve rejection of violence against women by increasing rejection of gender inequality.



# 7 Findings: Specific types of violence against women



## CHAPTER RESULTS SUMMARY

### Specific types of violence against women

**Despite some improvements over time, myths, misconceptions and harmful stereotypes regarding different types of violence are still evident among a minority of Australians, as follows:**

- **Domestic violence:** misconceptions that perpetration can be justified, it is easy to leave violent relationships and domestic violence should be handled within the family (Section 7.1)
- **Sexual assault:** hostile stereotypes of women as vengeful and untrustworthy, heteronormative stereotypes that privilege men's entitlement to sex, and rape myths that sexual assault is primarily committed by strangers and that "genuine" victims report their assault immediately and have evidence of physical injury (Section 7.2)
- **Sexual harassment:** misconceptions that sexual harassment is "flattering" and not serious (Section 7.3)
- **Technology-facilitated abuse:** misconceptions that technology-facilitated abuse is not serious and is not a criminal offence (Section 7.4)
- **Stalking:** misconceptions that persistent attention or actions by a person that intend to maintain contact with and exercise power or control over another person are harmless or simply indicative of care and concern (Section 7.5)



Rejection of sexual violence was significantly higher in 2021 than in 2017. Rejection of domestic violence was significantly higher in 2021 than in 2009 and 2013 but plateaued between 2017 and 2021. In 2021, domestic violence, sexual violence and technology-facilitated abuse were rejected by most respondents and to a similar degree. However, various myths and misconceptions about each type of violence measured by the NCAS were evident in a minority of respondents, as outlined below.

## 7.1 Domestic violence

In this report, domestic violence refers to violence within current or past intimate partner relationships, which can cause physical, sexual or psychological harm. Domestic violence can include physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and financial abuse, and often occurs as a pattern of behaviour involving coercive control.

A minority of respondents endorsed myths or misconceptions about domestic violence that excuse or minimise this violence. For example, a minority of respondents agreed with:

- *misconceptions that perpetrators must have a defensible reason for their violent behaviour*, including that the victim provoked the violence (19%) or that the violence is a normal reaction to day-to-day stress (23%)
- *misconceptions that it is easy to leave violent relationships* and that victims who stay are partly responsible for the abuse continuing (10–25%), demonstrating a lack of understanding of the barriers to leaving, including financial barriers, emotional dependence and fear of reprisals
- *misconceptions that domestic violence is a private or family matter* and that victims should manage this violence without outside assistance (2–12%).

Concerningly, two in five respondents indicated that they would not know where to go if they needed outside support for someone experiencing domestic violence.

## 7.2 Sexual assault

Sexual assault is a form of sexual violence where sexual activity occurs without the consent of both parties, including where consent is not freely given or obtained or is withdrawn, or a person is unable to consent due to their age or other factors (Attorney-General's Department, 2022). Sexual assault occurs any time a person is forced, coerced or manipulated into any sexual activity, including coercing a person to engage in sexualised touching, kissing, rape and pornography.

A minority of respondents supported myths about sexual assault and about victims of sexual assault or drew on hostile stereotypes of women. For example, some respondents endorsed:

- *hostile gendered stereotypes of women as malicious, vengeful and untrustworthy*, agreeing that it's common for sexual assault allegations to be used as a way of "getting back at men" (34%) or because women regret a consensual sexual encounter (24%)
- *problematic heterosexual sex scripts*, which are socially constructed frameworks for sexual behaviour that privilege men's entitlement to sex, positioning men as the active initiators of sex and women as the "gatekeepers" who must resist men's advances. These attitudes rationalise men's aggressive sexual behaviour and disregard the need to gain consent due to the perception that it is biologically difficult for men to regulate their sexual behaviour, because once aroused, they "may not realise" a woman does not want to have sex (25%). These attitudes also create a double standard whereby a victim who was affected by alcohol or drugs is blamed for the sexual assault (6–10%), while a perpetrator who was affected by alcohol or drugs is excused (6%)
- *the rape myth that sexual assault is primarily committed by strangers* (18%), in contradiction to the evidence
- *myths regarding "genuine" sexual assault victims*, such as erroneous assumptions that real victims report their sexual assaults immediately (7%) and have evidence of physical injuries (5%).

## 7.3 Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is a form of sexual violence characterised by unwelcome sexual advances, sexualised comments, intrusive sexualised questions, requests for sexual favours or other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature which makes a person feel offended, humiliated or intimidated (*Sex Discrimination Act 1984* [Cth]). Sexual harassment can include, but is not limited to, staring or leering; indecent texts, emails or posts; indecent exposure; inappropriate comments; non-consensual sharing of intimate images; and unwanted touching.

A minority of respondents supported myths that sexual harassment is flattering or benign. For example, a minority of respondents agreed with:

- *attitudes that shift blame to women for sexual harassment*, agreeing that a woman is partly responsible if she gives her partner a naked picture of herself and he then shares it without her consent (21%) and that it's understandable that men touch women without permission because some women are so sexual in public (10%)



- *attitudes that objectify women and disregard consent*, such as agreeing that catcalls (13%) and being persistently pursued (13%) without consent is flattering for women
- *attitudes that minimise the seriousness of sexual harassment or mistrust women*, such as agreeing that women who are sexually harassed should not be believed if they delay reporting (7%) or that they should handle harassment without outside assistance (5%).

## 7.4 Technology-facilitated abuse

Technology-facilitated abuse is an umbrella term used to refer to forms of abuse where technology is the conduit or means of enacting or exercising abuse. Examples of technology-facilitated abuse include harassment, stalking, impersonation and threats via technology, as well as image-based abuse and other forms of abuse online (eSafety, 2022; Powell & Henry, 2019).

Most respondents (89%) were aware that it is a criminal offence to post or share a sexual picture of an ex-partner on social media without their consent. However, the seriousness and psychological impact of technology-facilitated abuse, including online stalking, is not appreciated by some Australians. For example, a minority of respondents:

- *minimised the seriousness of technology-facilitated abuse*, agreeing that consent could be disregarded in some circumstances, such as when a woman sends an intimate image to her partner and he shares it without her consent (21%)
- *did not recognise some forms of technology-facilitated abuse*, such as sending an unwanted sexual picture (9%), repeatedly tracking a woman electronically without her consent (7%) and targeting women on social media (6%).

## 7.5 Stalking

Stalking is a form of violence that can occur in person or via the use of technology. It involves a pattern of repeated behaviour with the intent to maintain contact with, or exercise power and control over, another person. Examples of stalking behaviours include tracking or following someone (in person or online) and loitering.

Most respondents recognised technology-facilitated and in-person stalking as violence always or usually (83–89%). However, a minority did not recognise this behaviour as violence against women or domestic violence (4–7%).



# 8 Findings: Bystander response

A bystander is somebody who observes, but is not directly involved in, a harmful or potentially harmful event and could assist or intervene (Webster et al., 2018).

**Prosocial bystander actions can include confronting the perpetrator's unacceptable, gendered and violence-condoning attitudes and behaviour as well as supporting the victim and survivor.**



## CHAPTER RESULTS SUMMARY

## Findings: Bystander response

Prosocial bystander responses depended on:

- the type of abusive or disrespectful behaviour (Section 8.2)
- the presence of a power differential between the bystander and the perpetrator (Section 8.2)
- the gender composition of respondents' networks (Section 8.2)
- anticipated peer support (Section 8.3)
- barriers to intervention (Section 8.4)
- attitudes and understanding (Section 8.5)
- other characteristics of the bystander (Section 8.5).

The bystander role is important in the prevention of violence against women. Prosocial bystanders can call out unacceptable behaviour, place social sanctions on perpetrators that discourage future perpetration, help victims and survivors to feel supported and heard, and in some situations, prevent violence from escalating or even occurring (Bell & Flood, 2020; Orchowski et al., 2018; Palmer et al., 2020). The way communities respond to everyday microaggressions is also important because while not all disrespect results in violence, all violence against women begins with disrespect (Australian Government, 2022).

### 8.1 2021 NCAS bystander scenarios

Respondents were asked about three bystander scenarios and whether they would be bothered by the scenario, how they would react, reasons for not acting and the responses they anticipated from their peers if they did respond:

- *Friend sexist joke (B1)*: Imagine you are talking with some close friends at work, and a male work friend tells a sexist joke about women.
- *Boss sexist joke (B2)*: Now, instead, imagine it was your male boss rather than a work friend who told the sexist joke.
- *Friend verbal abuse (B3)*: Imagine you are out with some friends and a male friend is insulting or verbally abusing a woman he is in a relationship with.

### 8.2 Bystander response to each scenario

Most respondents said they would be bothered by each scenario. However, there were significant differences by scenario type:

- Virtually all respondents said they would be bothered by the verbal abuse scenario (99%; B3).
- Significantly fewer respondents said they would be bothered by the sexist joke scenarios (69–86%; B1, B2). It is particularly notable that almost a third (31%) of respondents said they would *not* be bothered by a close work friend telling a sexist joke (B1), whereas only 14 per cent would not be bothered by a boss telling a sexist joke (B2).

Figure 8-1 shows whether those who said they would be bothered by the scenarios would intervene by showing their disapproval (immediately in public or later in private) or would not intervene. Most respondents who reported that they would be bothered also said that they would show their disapproval either publicly or privately (73–94%). The likelihood of showing disapproval when bothered varied by the context, depending on:

- *the type of abusive behaviour*, with significantly more respondents saying they would show disapproval in response to verbal abuse (94%) than to a sexist joke (73–90%)
- *the presence of a power differential* between the bystander and the perpetrator, with significantly

fewer respondents saying they would show public disapproval if a boss (35%) rather than a friend (58-64%) told a sexist joke.<sup>4</sup>

Intention to intervene as a prosocial bystander also varied by *the gender composition of respondents' networks*. Respondents who had men-dominated occupations and social networks were significantly less likely to report prosocial bystander responses (feeling bothered by the scenario and intention to intervene), particularly if they were men.

### 8.3 Anticipated peer support or criticism

For the friend sexist joke (B1) and friend verbal abuse (B3) scenarios, respondents who said they would show their disapproval (either in public or in private) were asked to imagine how their friends would react if the respondent showed their disapproval of the disrespectful behaviour then and there in public. Most respondents expected that if they showed their disapproval in these two scenarios, their peers would support them, either then

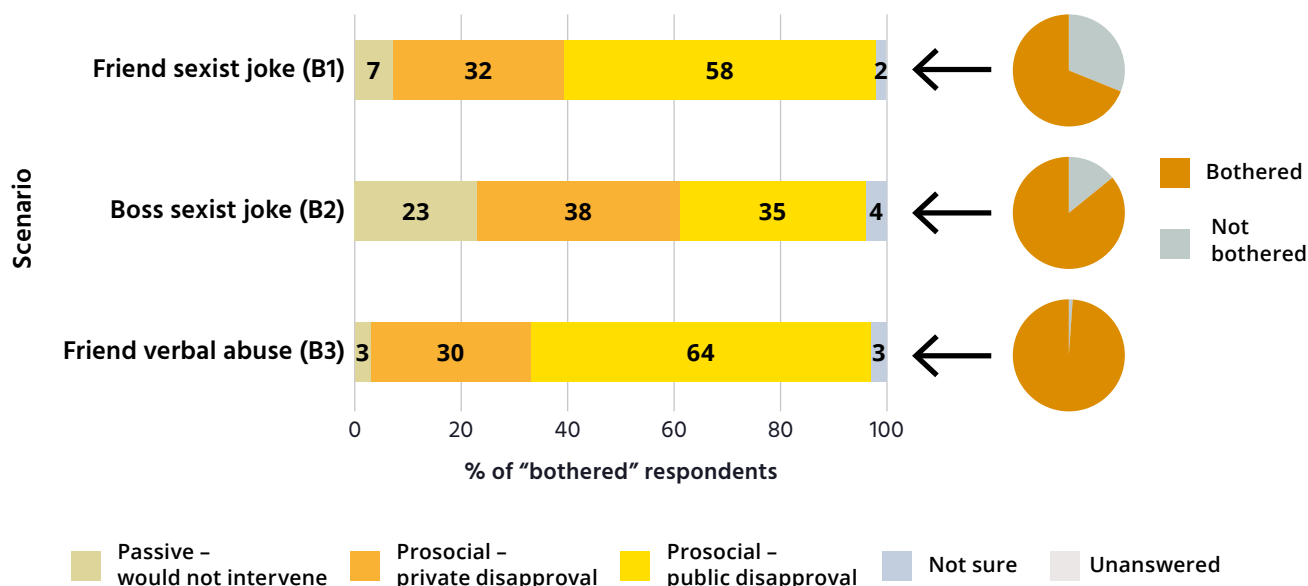
and there in public or later in private (80% for B1; 76% for B3). Only a minority of respondents expected that showing their disapproval would result in peer criticism or peer silence (14% for B1; 16% for B3).

The likelihood of showing disapproval when bothered varied by whether respondents anticipated peer support. For both friend scenarios, respondents were significantly more likely to say they would show disapproval publicly if they thought their friends would support them publicly (75-77%) than if they anticipated any other type of peer reaction (47-64%). Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that a substantial percentage of respondents in both scenarios who anticipated criticism from their peers for speaking out still said they would disapprove publicly (47-60%).

### 8.4 Barriers to bystander intention to intervene

In 2021, items were added to the NCAS to investigate why some people do not intervene when witnessing abuse or disrespect. Respondents who were bothered by a

Figure 8-1: Bystander intention to intervene if bothered by scenario, 2021



Note: N = 3,188 (B1); 4,113 (B2); 4,623 (B3). Bar figure includes only respondents “bothered” by the sexist joke (B1, B2) or verbal abuse (B3). Pie figures are based on all respondents. Only respondents who indicated they would be “bothered” were asked how they would react. Percentages in the figure do not always add to 100 due to rounding.

4 Expressed as a proportion of *all* respondents (rather than as a proportion of those who would be bothered), 59 per cent of respondents said they would show their disapproval in the friend sexist joke scenario; 63 per cent would do so in the boss sexist joke scenario; and 92 per cent would do so in the friend verbal abuse scenario.

scenario but would not intervene (passive bystanders) were asked about their reasons for not speaking up, with the most common reasons across all scenarios being:

- “It might have negative consequences” (75–91%)
- “You wouldn’t feel comfortable speaking up” (75–79%)
- “You wouldn’t know what to say” (60–62%)
- “It wouldn’t make any difference (34–52%)
- “It’s not your business” (30–58%).

There were some scenario-based differences in the reasons for being a passive bystander and saying nothing:

- Passive bystanders were significantly more likely to think it was not their business when a friend was verbally abusing their partner (B3; 58%) than when their boss told a sexist joke (B2; 30%). This finding is consistent with the result that more than 1 in 10 respondents perceived domestic violence as “a private matter that should be handled in the family” (D16; Chapter 7). Thus, further education is needed to raise awareness that domestic violence is a crime, dispel the dangerous myth that it should be handled within the family, and provide bystanders with the skills and resources they need to intervene effectively without risking the safety of the victim and survivor or themselves (ACON, 2018; Cares et al., 2014; Hooker et al., 2021; Katz et al., 2021; Palmer et al., 2020).
- Passive bystanders were significantly more likely to anticipate negative consequences of intervening in the boss than the friend sexist joke scenario (91% for B2 versus 75% for B1) and significantly more likely to think that intervening would make no difference in the boss sexist joke scenario than the friend verbal

abuse scenario (52% for B2 versus 34% for B3). These results further underscore the importance of ensuring there are safe and effective mechanisms for preventing and responding to sexist behaviour and related behaviours such as sexual harassment in the workplace.

## 8.5 Assessing the importance of demographics, understanding and attitudes

According to multiple logistic regression analyses, respondents were significantly more likely to be bothered by sexist jokes if they had stronger rejection of gender inequality and if they recognised that violence against women is a problem in Australia. However, demographics, understanding of violence and attitudes together explained only 20 per cent or less of the differences in respondents’ likelihood of being bothered by the sexist joke scenarios.

Demographics, understanding and attitudes together explained even less (no more than 5%) of the differences in respondents’ likelihood of intervening when witnessing sexist jokes or verbal abuse.

Thus, other factors are needed to explain most of the variance in respondents’ likelihood of being bothered (80–81%) or intervening (95–98%) when witnessing abuse or disrespect.



# 9 Findings: People and contexts

**The demographic group, population or culture surrounding an individual may shape or influence their attitudes, beliefs and behaviour**, including their attitudes towards social issues (Brennan et al., 2015; Bročić & Miles, 2021; Olson, 2019; Pavlíček et al., 2021; Roberts, 2019).





## CHAPTER RESULTS SUMMARY

## Findings: People and contexts

There were some differences in understanding, attitudes or bystander responses according to demographic characteristics. For example, some significant differences indicated more “advanced” understanding, attitudes or bystander responses among:

- women and non-binary people compared to men (Section 9.1)
- lesbian; gay; bisexual or pansexual; and asexual, queer or sexuality-diverse respondents compared to heterosexuals (Section 9.3)
- Australian-born respondents compared to those born in a non-main English-speaking country (N-MESC; Section 9.5)
- university graduates compared to people with lower levels of education (Section 9.6)
- employed people compared to other people (Section 9.7)
- people living in areas with the highest socioeconomic status compared to those in areas with the lowest socioeconomic status (Section 9.8).

Demographic differences in understanding, attitudes and likely bystander responses can inform the barriers and facilitators of violence prevention initiatives with different demographic groups. Importantly, however, demographic factors explained only a fraction of the picture, suggesting there is room for improvement *across the population*.

This chapter presents results on differences between demographic groups in understanding and attitudes towards violence, attitudes towards gender equality and intended bystander responses when witnessing abuse or disrespect towards women. Implications for these findings are discussed in Chapter 10. Based on multiple regression analysis, Table 9-1 shows which demographic groups had significantly higher (>), significantly lower (<) or not significantly different (ns) results compared to the reference group. When interpreting these findings, keep in mind that demographic factors explained only a relatively small portion of the picture.

**Table 9-1: Significant demographic predictors of understanding of violence against women (UVAWS), rejection of gender inequality (AGIS), rejection of violence against women (AVAWS), and likelihood of being bothered or intervening as a bystander (Scenarios B1, B2 and B3), 2021**

Demographic factor (% unique contribution to outcome variable)	Demographic group	Outcome variable in the regression model							
		Understanding of violence against women (UVAWS)	Rejection of gender inequality (AGIS)	Rejection of violence against women (AVAWS)	Likelihood of being bothered		Likelihood of intervening		
					Friend sexist joke (B1)	Boss sexist joke (B2)	Friend sexist joke (B1)	Boss sexist joke (B2)	Friend verbal abuse (B3)
		Multiple linear regression: significantly higher (>) or lower (<) understanding or rejection compared to REF <sup>a</sup>			Multiple logistic regression: significantly higher (>) or lower (<) likelihood compared to REF <sup>b</sup>				
<b>Gender</b> (1.8–5.1%)	<b>Men</b> <sup>REF</sup>								
	Women	>	>	>	>	>	ns	-	-
	Non-binary respondents	>	>	ns	ns	ns	ns	-	-
<b>Age (in years)</b> (0.4–3.8%)	<b>All ages on average</b> <sup>REF</sup>								
	16–24	ns	ns	ns	>	>	-	<	-
	25–34	ns	ns	>	ns	ns	-	<	-
	35–44	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	-	ns	-
	45–54	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	-	ns	-
	55–64	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	-	ns	-
	65–74	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	-	>	-
	75+	ns	<	<	ns	ns	-	ns	-
<b>Sexuality</b> (0.5–1.9%)	<b>Heterosexual</b> <sup>REF</sup>								
	Lesbian	>	>	>					
	Gay	ns	>	>					
	Bisexual or pansexual	ns	>	>					
	Asexual, queer or diverse sexualities	ns	>	>					
Sexuality was excluded from bystander regression models due to small numbers in some groups									

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Demographic factor (% unique contribution to outcome variable)	Demographic group	Outcome variable in the regression model							
		Understanding of violence against women (UVAWS)	Rejection of gender inequality (AGIS)	Rejection of violence against women (AVAWS)	Likelihood of being bothered		Likelihood of intervening		
					Friend sexist joke (B1)	Boss sexist joke (B2)	Friend sexist joke (B1)	Boss sexist joke (B2)	Friend verbal abuse (B3)
Multiple linear regression: significantly higher (>) or lower (<) understanding or rejection compared to REF <sup>a</sup>			Multiple logistic regression: significantly higher (>) or lower (<) likelihood compared to REF <sup>b</sup>						
<b>Country of birth and length of time in Australia<sup>c</sup></b> (0.4–2.9%)	<b>Born in Australia<sup>REF</sup></b>								
	MESC: 0–5 years	ns	ns	ns					
	MESC: 6–10 years	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	-	-	-
	MESC: >10 years	ns	ns	ns					
	N-MESC: 0–5 years	<	<	<	ns	>	-	-	-
	N-MESC: 6–10 years	ns	ns	<	>	>	-	-	-
	N-MESC: >10 years	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	-	-	-
<b>English proficiency<sup>d</sup></b> (1.6–3.0%)	<b>English at home<sup>REF</sup></b>								
	LOTE: good English	<	<	<	-	-	-	ns	-
	LOTE: poor English	<	<	<					
<b>Formal education</b> (2.3–2.9%)	<b>University or higher<sup>REF</sup></b>								
	Trade/certificate/diploma	ns	<	<	<	<	-	-	-
	Secondary or below	ns	<	<	<	<	-	-	-

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Demographic factor (% unique contribution to outcome variable)	Demographic group	Outcome variable in the regression model							
		Understanding of violence against women (UVAWS)	Rejection of gender inequality (AGIS)	Rejection of violence against women (AVAWS)	Likelihood of being bothered		Likelihood of intervening		
					Friend sexist joke (B1)	Boss sexist joke (B2)	Friend sexist joke (B1)	Boss sexist joke (B2)	Friend verbal abuse (B3)
		Multiple linear regression: significantly higher (>) or lower (<) understanding or rejection compared to REF <sup>a</sup>			Multiple logistic regression: significantly higher (>) or lower (<) likelihood compared to REF <sup>b</sup>				
<b>Main labour activity<sup>e</sup></b> (0.3–2.0%)	<b>Employed<sup>REF</sup></b>								
	Unemployed	ns	ns	<	ns	-	-	-	ns
	Student	ns	ns	ns	ns	-	-	-	ns
	Retired	ns	ns	ns	ns	-	-	-	<
	Unable to work	ns	ns	ns	>	-	-	-	<
	Home duties	ns	ns	ns					
	Volunteering	ns	ns	ns	ns	-	-	-	ns
	Other	ns	ns	ns					
<b>Socioeconomic status of area<sup>f</sup></b> (0.7–1.1%)	<b>5 – Highest status<sup>REF</sup></b>								
	1 – Lowest status	ns	<	<	ns	ns	-	ns	-
	2 – Second-lowest status	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	-	ns	-
	3 – Middle status	ns	ns	ns	ns	<	-	ns	-
	4 – Second-highest status	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	-	ns	-

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Demographic factor (% unique contribution to outcome variable)	Demographic group	Outcome variable in the regression model							
		Understanding of violence against women (UVAWS)	Rejection of gender inequality (AGIS)	Rejection of violence against women (AVAWS)	Likelihood of being bothered		Likelihood of intervening		
					Friend sexist joke (B1)	Boss sexist joke (B2)	Friend sexist joke (B1)	Boss sexist joke (B2)	Friend verbal abuse (B3)
		Multiple linear regression: significantly higher (>) or lower (<) understanding or rejection compared to REF <sup>a</sup>			Multiple logistic regression: significantly higher (>) or lower (<) likelihood compared to REF <sup>b</sup>				
Gender composition of social network (0.9–1.4%)	Mainly/totally men (men-dominated) <sup>REF</sup>	Gender composition of social network was excluded from the scale regression as it was quarter-sampled							
	Mainly/totally women (women-dominated)				>	>	ns	ns	-
	Equally men and women (gender-balanced)				ns	ns	>	>	-

**Note:**  $N = 18,876$  (UVAWS Model 1), 18,869 (AGIS Model 1), 18,876 (AVAWS Model 1), 4,317 (B1 – Bothered Model 1), 4,327 (B2 – Bothered Model 1), 2,991 (B1 – Intervene Model 1), 3,781 (B2 – Intervene Model 1) and 4,327 (B3 – Intervene Model 1). Disability and remoteness are not included in this table because they were not significant independent predictors in any of these regression models.

<sup>REF</sup> The reference group for this demographic factor. All other groups for the demographic factor were compared to the REF. The REF was chosen based on considerations of statistical power (i.e. the group with the most respondents) and ease of interpretation (e.g. comparing the group with the highest formal education to each other group).

**ns** No significant difference between this demographic group and the REF.

– This input variable did not improve model fit so was excluded from the final version of the model.

**a** Based on the multiple linear regression results, this demographic group had significantly higher (>), significantly lower (<) or not significantly different (ns) understanding or rejection of problematic attitudes compared with the REF.

**b** Based on the multiple logistic regression results, this demographic group had significantly higher (>), significantly lower (<) or not significantly different (ns) likelihood of being bothered or intervening compared with the REF.

**c** “MESC” refers to people born in a main English-speaking overseas country (ABS classification), and “N-MESC” refers to people born in a non-main English-speaking country. The number of years refers to the number of years since the respondent moved to Australia. Due to small numbers, the three MESC groups were combined into a single MESC in the bystander regressions.

**d** “LOTE” refers to language other than English spoken at home. “Good English” refers to good or very good self-reported English proficiency and “poor English” refers to no English or poor self-reported English proficiency. Due to small numbers, the two LOTE groups were combined into a single LOTE group in the bystander regressions.

**e** Due to small numbers, “home duties” and “volunteering” were included in the “other” group in the bystander regressions.

**f** “Socioeconomic status of area” refers to an ABS measure of socioeconomic conditions in geographic areas in terms of people’s access to material and social resources, and their opportunity to participate in society (SEIFA quintiles).

## 9.1 Gender

Although men and women showed similar rates of improvement over time, women maintained more “advanced” understanding, attitudes and prosocial bystander responses regarding violence against women and gender equality. Women were significantly more likely than men to demonstrate stronger:

- *understanding of violence against women*, including understanding of the diverse behaviours constituting domestic violence and violence against women more broadly
- *rejection of gender inequality*, including rejection of attitudes that reinforce rigid gender roles, undermine women’s leadership, limit women’s autonomy in relationships, normalise sexism and deny gender inequality experiences
- *rejection of violence against women*, including rejection of domestic violence, sexual violence, attitudes that minimise violence against women and shift blame, and attitudes that mistrust women’s reports of violence
- *prosocial bystander responses*, being more likely to be bothered by sexist jokes and to show public disapproval if a work friend told a sexist joke.

Non-binary respondents were significantly more likely to demonstrate stronger:

- *understanding of violence against women* compared to men
- *rejection of gender inequality* compared to men and women, including higher rejection of attitudes that reinforce rigid gender roles, undermine women’s leadership **and** deny gender inequality experiences (compared to men and women), and higher rejection of attitudes that normalise sexism (compared to men)
- *rejection of domestic violence compared to men and stronger rejection of sexual violence compared to men and women*, as well as stronger rejection of attitudes that objectify women and disregard consent (compared to men and women), and attitudes that mistrust women’s reports of violence (compared to men).

## 9.2 Age

There were no significant differences in understanding of violence against women by age. However, there were a few significant differences in attitudes and bystander responses for younger and older respondents, compared to all ages on average:

- *Younger respondents (25 to 34 years) demonstrated significantly higher rejection of violence against women*, especially sexual violence.
- *Younger respondents (16 to 34 years) were significantly less likely to intervene* if a boss told a sexist joke, despite 16- to 24-year-olds being more likely to be bothered by sexist jokes.
- *Older respondents (75 years or over) demonstrated significantly lower rejection of gender inequality and violence against women*, including domestic and sexual violence.
- *Older respondents (65 to 74 years) were significantly more likely to intervene* if a boss told a sexist joke.

## 9.3 Sexuality

Heterosexual respondents were significantly less likely to demonstrate stronger:

- *understanding of violence against women* compared to lesbians
- *rejection of gender inequality* compared to lesbian; gay; bisexual or pansexual; and asexual, queer or sexuality-diverse respondents
- *rejection of violence against women* compared to lesbian; gay; bisexual or pansexual; and asexual, queer or sexuality-diverse respondents, including:
  - *rejection of domestic and sexual violence* compared to lesbian; gay; bisexual or pansexual; and asexual, queer or sexuality-diverse respondents
  - *rejection of technology-facilitated abuse* compared to lesbians and bisexual or pansexual respondents.

## 9.4 Disability

Disability status was not a significant predictor of understanding, attitudes or bystander responses after other demographic factors had been adjusted for in the regression analyses.

## 9.5 Country of birth and English proficiency

While respondents born in an N-MESC and respondents who spoke a language other than English (LOTE) at home were less likely to display “advanced” understanding and attitudes, this effect declined with increasing English proficiency and increased time living in Australia.

Respondents born in N-MESCs were significantly less likely than Australian-born respondents to demonstrate strong:

- *understanding of violence against women and rejection of gender inequality*, but only if they had lived in Australia for less than six years
- *rejection of violence against women*, including domestic and sexual violence, but only if they had lived in Australia less than 11 years.

Respondents who spoke a LOTE at home were significantly less likely than Australian-born respondents to demonstrate strong:

- *understanding of violence against women*
- *rejection of gender inequality*
- *rejection of violence against women*, including domestic, sexual and technology-facilitated violence, especially if they had poor English proficiency.

## 9.6 Formal education

There were no significant differences in understanding of violence against women by formal education. However, respondents with university qualifications were significantly more likely than those with lower levels of education to demonstrate stronger:

- *rejection of gender inequality*
- *rejection of violence against women*, particularly sexual violence
- *prosocial bystander responses*, being more likely to be bothered by sexist jokes (although they were no more likely to intervene).

## 9.7 Main labour activity

Employed adults were significantly more likely to demonstrate stronger:

- *rejection of violence against women*, including sexual violence and domestic violence, compared to unemployed respondents

- *intention to intervene as a prosocial bystander* if a friend were verbally abusing their partner, compared to retirees and those unable to work.

However, students and respondents who were unable to work were more likely than employed respondents to be bothered by a friend telling a sexist joke.

## 9.8 Socioeconomic status of area

Respondents living in areas with the lowest socioeconomic status were significantly less likely to reject gender inequality and violence against women, when compared to respondents living in the highest socioeconomic status areas.

## 9.9 Major cities, regional and remote areas

There were no significant differences in understanding, attitudes or bystander responses based on whether respondents lived in major cities, regional or remote areas, after other demographic factors had been adjusted for in the regression analyses.

## 9.10 Gender composition of occupation and social contexts

Women-dominated contexts were linked to higher rejection of gender inequality and violence against women, whereas men-dominated contexts were linked to greater tolerance of sexist jokes:

- *Significantly higher rejection of gender inequality* was demonstrated by men in women-dominated occupations and respondents with women-dominated social networks.
- *Significantly higher rejection of violence against women*, particularly sexual violence, was demonstrated by women with women-dominated social networks.
- Respondents with women-dominated social networks were more likely to be bothered by sexist jokes, while men in men-dominated occupations were less likely to be bothered.
- Respondents with gender-balanced social networks would be more likely than men with men-dominated social networks to intervene when witnessing a sexist joke.



# 10 Implications of the NCAS findings for ending violence against women

**Family, domestic and sexual violence are major health and welfare issues that transcend all backgrounds in Australia** (ABS, 2017, 2021a, 2021b).

The National Plan 2010–2022 was born out of a recognition that all states and territories have a duty to work together to create “communities ... safe and free from violence” (COAG, 2010b, p. 14).



The implications of the 2021 NCAS findings are largely consistent with the objectives outlined in the National Plan 2022–2032, which emphasise the importance of initiatives across the domains of (primary) prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery and healing (COAG, 2022; Section 1.3). Many of the NCAS findings are particularly relevant to primary prevention and early intervention, but some also highlight opportunities for initiatives to support response, and recovery and healing.

Important policy and legislative work towards meeting the objectives of the National Plan 2022–2032 has already begun, including:

- the development of a set of national principles to address coercive control (Meeting of Attorneys-General, 2022)
- implementation of Respect@Work Report recommendations, including amendments to the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth) requiring that employers take steps to address sexual harassment in workplaces (Attorney-General's Department, n.d.)
- working towards the development of Australia's first National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality (Office for Women, 2023), which will be complemented and supported by the work of the recently established Women's Economic Equality Taskforce (Office for Women, 2022)
- the funding and delivery of Respectful Relationships Education programs in Australian schools (S. Clark, 2022).

As described by the socioecological model, such policy and legislative changes must be complemented by efforts across all levels of the social ecology to achieve the goal of ending violence against women.

As discussed in Section 1.2, this model describes violence against women as a complex social problem driven by multiple interacting factors at all levels within society, including individual understanding, attitudes and values, as well as practices, processes, systems and structures at the organisational, community, institutional and societal levels (Heise, 1998; Our Watch, 2021).

The findings of the 2021 NCAS demonstrate that positive changes to community understanding and attitudes regarding gender inequality and violence against women are slowly occurring, suggesting movement towards achieving the aspiration of an Australian community that is safe and free from violence. However, more effort is still required to intervene where harmful individual and social norms prevail. Specifically, it is still necessary to continue to challenge biases, myths and misconceptions regarding violence against women and gender inequality held by individuals. In addition, broader practices, processes, systems and structures across society that maintain gender and other inequalities and inequities need to be addressed, and must also be supported by government, including via legal reform and response and recovery services for victims and survivors, such as health, legal and financial support services and safe housing.

This section summarises the key findings from the 2021 NCAS and discusses their implications for prevention initiatives across the social ecology and consistent with the National Plan 2022–2032 (COAG, 2022). The main report presents further details on the implications of the 2021 NCAS.

## 10.1 Benchmarking understanding and attitudes

### ■ Key findings

Positive shifts in understanding of violence and attitudes towards gender inequality and violence against women are occurring slowly.

- All NCAS scales showed improvement in 2021 compared to 2013.
- Since 2017, understanding of violence (UVAWS), rejection of gender inequality (AGIS), and rejection of sexual violence (SVS) have improved, but attitudes towards violence against women overall (AVAWS) and domestic violence (DVS) have plateaued.
- Understanding that violence against women is a problem in Australia is higher than understanding that this violence also occurs in one's local area.

Further positive change is needed to achieve more progressive understanding and attitudes across the Australian population, as fewer than half of the respondents demonstrated "advanced" understanding of violence against women; "advanced" rejection of gender inequality; and "advanced" rejection of violence against women, domestic violence and sexual violence.

### ■ Implications

- Employ a cohesive, national solution at every level of the social ecology to shift violence-supporting norms and end violence against women.
  - Employ primary prevention and early intervention strategies, as problematic attitudes are difficult to shift.
  - "Personalise" violence against women as a community-wide social problem that requires community-wide responsibility and action.
-



## 10.2 Understanding of violence against women (UVAWS)

### Key findings

- Most Australians have a good overall understanding of violence against women, and this understanding has slowly but consistently improved over successive NCAS waves.
- Most Australians recognise that domestic violence, and violence against women more broadly, can manifest as a diverse range of physical and non-physical behaviours, but there is less recognition of non-physical forms of abuse and violence and coercive control than physical forms of violence.
- There was also less recognition of forms of domestic violence involving exploitation of aspects of a partner's identity or experience, such as chronic health conditions, sexual diversity, religion and migrant status.
- There is also room to improve understanding of the gendered nature of domestic violence as a phenomenon that is mainly perpetrated by men against women.
- Demographic factors explain only a very small amount of the differences in people's understanding of violence against women, suggesting other factors are also important in predicting or shaping individual understanding.

### Implications

- Develop consistent definitions of domestic violence and coercive control across legislative and policy settings Australia-wide and ensure these consistent definitions are adopted across education and prevention initiatives.
- Increase recognition of the many forms of domestic violence and violence against women within the community and justice and service systems, including non-physical forms of violence against women such as financial abuse, emotional abuse, coercive control and technology-facilitated abuse.
- Increase awareness of the ways intersecting inequalities exacerbate risk of violence for marginalised groups and produce unique forms of domestic violence and violence against women.
- Support industries, businesses, service providers and governments to create policies to identify, appropriately respond to and prevent violence against women within their spaces.
- Increase awareness of the gendered nature of domestic violence by addressing "gender-ignoring" bias and "backlash". For example, prevention initiatives should:
  - Address any scepticism about the gendered nature of domestic violence and abuse by highlighting established and unequivocal statistics in awareness, education and training initiatives.
  - Improve understanding of structural inequalities, including gender inequality, which drive the conditions for men's predominant use of violence, abuse and control.
  - Adopt gender-transformative strategies to change problematic gendered norms, including harmful masculinity norms that entail dominant, aggressive, controlling and hypersexual behaviour.
  - Address "backlash" or resistance towards gender equality movements as they may underlie gender-ignoring biases related to domestic violence.
  - Employ respectful relationships education to emphasise both the importance of equal power balance in respectful relationships and the barriers to this in the current patriarchal and heteronormative society, as well as to transform problematic gendered expectations.
- Address barriers to understanding violence against women across the population and at all levels of the social ecology as people are embedded within, and influenced by, the social ecology at every level.

## 10.3 Attitudes towards gender inequality (AGIS)

### Key findings

- Most Australians reject attitudes that condone or reinforce gender inequality, and these attitudes continue to steadily improve, albeit slowly, over time, but some problematic attitudes persist in a minority of the population.
- A sizeable minority of Australians still endorse certain aspects of gender inequality, for example through attitudes that deny women's gender inequality experiences, limit women's personal autonomy in relationships, undermine women's leadership in public life, normalise sexism, and reinforce rigid gender roles for men and women.
- Demographic factors and understanding of violence against women (UVAWS) explain only some of the differences in people's attitudes towards gender equality, suggesting other factors are also important in predicting or shaping these attitudes.

### Implications

- Improve attitudes and behaviours that support gender equality. Thus, initiatives should:
  - Address "backlash", or resistance towards gender equality movements wherever it occurs across the community, including resistance based on misperceptions that gender equality may result in men losing their social standing.
  - Promote gender equality in private and public life. Institutions, organisations and community groups should take responsibility for ensuring that both formal and informal processes provide equal opportunities and identify and remove systemic obstacles to gender equality.
  - Address the normalisation of sexism and tolerance of sexist microaggressions across social settings, including among peer groups, in organisations and in the media. It is important to challenge both benevolent and hostile sexist attitudes, as both are damaging to the achievement of gender equality and the eradication of violence against women.
  - Challenge rigid or harmful gender roles, stereotypes and expectations that diminish, denigrate or objectify women; that limit their opportunities in public or private life; and that legitimise men's dominant position in the family, in intimate relationships and in workplaces.
  - Ensure all strategies are gender-transformative in their design by encouraging individuals to actively challenge and reject limiting gender norms and inequities.
- Engage with all demographic groups across the population to improve attitudes and behaviours that support gender equality:
  - Incorporate violence against women knowledge components within programs that aim to promote gender equality.
  - Challenge attitudes condoning gender inequality through points of influence, such as peer and social groups.
  - Engage school-aged children in respectful relationships education.
  - Use strengths-based approaches to effectively engage with men and gender-transformative approaches to improve their attitudes to gender equality.

## 10.4 Attitudes towards violence against women (AVAWS)

### Key findings

Most Australians reject attitudes that condone violence against women, but improvement in these attitudes has been slower over time. These attitudes have significantly improved since 2013. However, they have plateaued since 2017, largely reflecting a plateau in attitudinal rejection of *domestic violence*, as there was a significant improvement in attitudinal rejection of *sexual violence* since 2017.

There are opportunities to improve certain attitudes towards violence against women, including attitudes that:

- mistrust women who report being victimised
- objectify women and disregard their consent
- minimise violence against women and shift blame from perpetrators to victims and survivors.

Australians' attitudes towards violence against women are strongly associated with their attitudes towards gender inequality, suggesting they need to be tackled together. Attitudes towards violence against women are also significantly but less strongly related to demographic factors and understanding of violence.

### Implications

- Raise awareness that problematic attitudes towards violence against women normalise and perpetuate this violence. Interventions should:
  - Challenge attitudes and norms across the social ecology that mistrust victims and survivors or excuse, minimise, condone or normalise violence against women.
  - Raise awareness of and challenge the objectification of women and its consequences.
  - Challenge attitudes that mistrust women and minimise violence and reflect discrimination based on intersecting inequalities.
- Foster a culture of trust and support in women's reports of violence victimisation across the social ecology to facilitate reporting. For example:
  - Promote appropriate reporting of perpetrators and violence against women in the media in adherence with the national guidelines set out by Our Watch (2019a).
  - Raise awareness of the barriers to women reporting violence, including attitudes that condone violence throughout society and structural and systemic inadequacies such as inadequate trauma-informed training of police, judiciary officers and jurors, which can lead to adverse outcomes for victims and survivors.
  - Affirm the seriousness of violence against women and place responsibility on the perpetrator.
- Address legislative, policy and service barriers to reporting of violence and recovery of victims and survivors. For example:
  - Upskill practitioners, police, justice officers and support services with best-practice training in victim- and survivor-centred, trauma-informed and culturally safe practices to facilitate appropriate response to disclosures of victimisation across the service and justice systems.
  - Reform legislation and legal processes to facilitate reporting and access to justice.
  - Provide coordinated legal, health and other support services to facilitate early reporting of violence and the recovery of victims and survivors.
  - Ensure institutions, including schools and universities, industries and businesses, have policies and processes that prioritise victims and survivors by treating violence and abuse seriously, and taking action to support victims' and survivors' needs and prevent further perpetration of violence.
- Strengthen attitudes supporting gender equality and improve understanding of violence against women to improve attitudes towards violence against women across the community.
- Improve attitudes towards violence against women across the population by targeting individual- and relationship-level factors within the social ecology. For example, initiatives should:
  - Address beliefs about the acceptability of violence in relationships through primary prevention and early intervention
  - Address attitudes among perpetrators that minimise violence, shift blame to victims and survivors, and objectify women.

## 10.5 Types of violence against women

The Domestic Violence Scale (DVS), Sexual Assault Scale (SAS), and Sexual Harassment Scale (SHS) consist of items drawn entirely from the AVAWS that examine attitudes towards these types of violence. Thus, see also “Attitudes towards Violence against Women” findings and implications regarding addressing attitudes that minimise violence and shift blame, mistrust women's reports of violence and objectify women, and disregard the need for consent.

### Domestic violence

#### Key findings

- Although attitudinal rejection of domestic violence (DVS) was higher in 2021 than in 2009 and 2013, there was no further significant improvement since 2017.
- Misconceptions about domestic violence are evident among a minority of the community, including misperceptions that perpetrators must have a defensible reason for their violent behaviour, that it is easy for victims and survivors to leave violent relationships, and that domestic violence is a private or family matter to be managed without outside assistance.
- Many Australians would not know how to access domestic violence services if they needed outside support for someone experiencing domestic violence.

#### Implications

- Challenge myths and misconceptions about domestic violence. For example, strategies could:
  - Assist perpetrators to accept responsibility for their violent behaviour.
  - Challenge community perceptions that domestic violence is a reasonable reaction to daily stressors.
  - Promote accurate media reporting of domestic violence, including via use of evidence-based language, framing violent incidents in line with the broad social issue of violence against women and providing contact details of support agencies.
  - Raise awareness of, and address, the barriers that many women face to leaving violent relationships.
- “Personalise” domestic violence as a community-wide problem that requires community-wide responsibility.
- Raise public awareness of where and how to seek help for domestic violence and ensure the service system is suitably funded and easily accessible to meet the demand for assistance.

## Sexual assault

### Key findings

Problematic myths and stereotypes about sexual assault, sexual consent and victims and survivors are evident among a sizable minority of respondents including:

- hostile gendered stereotypes of women as malicious, vengeful and untrustworthy
- problematic heterosexual sex scripts that privilege men's entitlement to sex, positioning men as the active initiators of sex and women as the "gatekeepers" who must resist men's advances
- the rape myth that sexual assault is primarily committed by strangers
- myths regarding "genuine" sexual assault victims.

### Implications

- Develop nationally consistent definitions of sexual assault and consent.
- Increase community understanding of affirmative, ongoing consent and address barriers to the success of affirmative consent initiatives.
- Shift problematic heterosexual sex scripts that privilege men's entitlement to sex by positioning men as dominant and aggressive sexual initiators and women as submissive sexual gatekeepers, as these place the responsibility of voicing consent and preventing sexual violence on women while absolving men from responsibility.
- Challenge the objectification of women and the normalisation of sexual violence in media, video games and pornography.
- Correct myths and misconceptions about the nature of sexual assault and "genuine" victims within the community and justice and service systems. For example:
  - Correct hostile gendered stereotypes that women are malicious, vindictive and untrustworthy and have ulterior motives for lying about sexual assault.
  - Address persistent myths that false allegations are common by highlighting the very high level of underreporting of sexual assault to police as well as the very small percentage of false allegations.
  - Increase recognition of the high prevalence of sexual assault and the diversity of sexual assault experiences.
  - Challenge rigid norms and expectations about who is likely to be a victim of sexual assault and how a victim and survivor "should" respond.
- Remove barriers to reporting of sexual assault, including by ensuring the availability of trauma-informed and victim- and survivor-centred reporting processes that make the process easier, safer and more accessible for all victims and survivors irrespective of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, age and class background.

## Sexual harassment

### Key findings

Misunderstanding of sexual harassment as flattering, benign or warranted persists among some Australians. For example, a minority of respondents agreed with:

- attitudes that shift blame to women for sexual harassment
- attitudes that objectify women and disregard consent
- attitudes that minimise the seriousness of sexual harassment or mistrust women.

### Implications<sup>5</sup>

- Challenge public misconceptions that sexual harassment, whether in person or technology-facilitated, is not serious. For example:
  - Raise awareness of the different forms of sexual harassment that can occur online and in person.
  - Raise awareness that sexual harassment can result in serious financial, social, emotional, physical and psychological harms and can attract legal penalties.
  - Employ community education campaigns to identify and “call out” the everyday microaggressions that define sexual harassment in workplaces, social settings, and other online and offline contexts.
- Educate the community about the need for consent and shift problematic heterosexual sex scripts that privilege men’s entitlement to sex.
- Ensure all spaces, including workplaces, educational institutions and online forums, are safe and respectful for all people through legislation and policy frameworks.

## Technology-facilitated abuse

### Key findings

A minority of Australians do not appreciate the gravity and impacts of technology-facilitated abuse. For example, a minority of respondents:

- minimised the seriousness of technology-facilitated abuse agreeing that consent could be disregarded in some circumstances
- did not recognise some forms of technology-facilitated abuse, such as repeatedly tracking a partner on electronic devices without consent and targeting women on social media.

### Implications

- Increase understanding of the different forms of technology-facilitated abuse and its serious impact. Initiatives should:
  - Raise awareness of the range of behaviours that constitute technology-facilitated abuse and that technology-facilitated abuse is common.
  - Raise awareness of the legal penalties and powers of the eSafety Commissioner regarding technology-facilitated abuse and the civil and criminal penalties associated with some of these abusive behaviours.
- Increase digital literacy to facilitate recognition and reporting of technology-facilitated abuse and to enhance skills for accessing support.
- Prevent technology-facilitated abuse through safety-by-design principles in all online products and services and through responsive legislative frameworks that address emerging forms of this abuse.

<sup>5</sup> See also implications for sexual assault and attitudes towards violence against women.

## Stalking

### ■ Key findings

Most, but not all, Australians recognise technology-facilitated and in-person stalking behaviour as violence against women or domestic violence.

### ■ Implications

- Increase understanding of the different forms of stalking, both in person and online, and its serious impacts. Initiatives should:
    - Raise awareness of the range of stalking behaviours to assist people to identify stalking behaviours and take protective actions before they escalate. Also raise awareness of the often gendered nature of stalking and that it can occur both within and outside a domestic or family violence context, among heterosexual people and in the LGBTQ+ community.
    - Raise awareness of the serious physical and mental health impacts of stalking behaviours.
    - Raise awareness of and challenge stalking behaviours via peer networks.
  - Support victims and survivors of stalking to seek assistance and increase perpetrator accountability.
-

## 10.6 Bystander response

### Key findings

Most Australians would intend to intervene prosocially in response to witnessing abuse and disrespect. However, prosocial bystander intervention is context-dependent and can vary according to the type of disrespectful or abusive behaviour, power differentials, anticipated peer support or criticism, and the gender composition of respondents' occupation and social networks.

Prosocial bystander responses also depend somewhat on attitudes towards gender inequality and acknowledging violence is a problem.

However, multiple barriers can impede prosocial bystander intervention, including personal, context-specific and structural barriers.

### Implications<sup>6</sup>

- Boost bystander intention and competence to intervene prosocially when witnessing violence or disrespect against women in a range of contexts. For example, initiatives should:
  - Increase bystander knowledge, confidence and skills for accurately identifying disrespect and violence and engaging in prosocial bystander behaviours and for supporting other people's prosocial bystander behaviour in a safe and effective way via training and awareness campaigns.
  - Challenge the normalisation of everyday hostile sexism, such as the tendency for people, especially men, to perceive sexist and racist jokes as harmless.
  - Encourage bystanders to identify with positive group norms that reject violence against women and endorse prosocial bystander intervention.
  - Remove barriers and negative consequences to speaking out, including barriers related to power imbalances in workplaces, and correct misperceptions, especially among men, that it is "not their business" to speak out.
  - Increase community attitudes that reject gender inequality and acknowledge violence against women as a problem.
  - Promote the advantages of intervening when witnessing disrespect or abuse and increase knowledge of safe ways to intervene.
  - Employ context-specific bystander initiatives tailored according to the power dynamics, social pressures, barriers and safety considerations that may be relevant in different situations.
  - Educate leaders and managers to develop and maintain respectful and gender-equitable work environments and to remove barriers to calling out abuse.

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<sup>6</sup> See also the implications relating to men in Section 10.7..



## 10.7 People and contexts

Understanding, attitudes and bystander responses are related to multiple, complex factors, including demographic factors. However, demographics explain only a fraction of the picture, indicating that there is room for improvement across all demographic groups in the population.

### Gender

#### ■ Key findings

There is a persistent gender gap between men and women in understanding of violence against women, rejection of gender inequality, rejection of violence against women and prosocial bystander responses, with men lagging behind.

Non-binary respondents were consistently more likely to have “advanced” understanding and rejection of problematic attitudes compared to men and sometimes also compared to women.

#### ■ Implications

- Engage men as advocates and agents for violence prevention via gender-transformative, strengths-based and intersectional approaches that transform harmful understandings of masculinity, build on men’s existing strengths and recognise that violence is experienced differently depending on the combination of intersecting oppressions that are relevant to an individual.
- Change attitudes that mistrust women and minimise violence, particularly among men.
- Improve attitudes to gender inequality, including via addressing backlash, particularly among men.
- Build attitude change into men’s behaviour change programs and encourage early engagement with attitude and behaviour change programs, particularly for men at higher risk for offending.
- Encourage and remove barriers to prosocial bystander intervention among men by fostering masculinity norms that reject violence, including via men’s peer groups.
- Enlist non-binary people as informed and empathetic allies in violence prevention.

## Age

### ■ Key findings

Age was not a consistent predictor of understanding, attitudes and prosocial bystander responses, although some age differences were found.

Younger respondents (25 to 34 years) demonstrated significantly higher rejection of violence against women, especially sexual violence, while older respondents (75 years or over) demonstrated significantly lower rejection of gender inequality and violence against women, including domestic and sexual violence.

Older respondents were also significantly more likely and younger respondents were significantly less likely to intervene if a boss told a sexist joke.

### ■ Implications

- Address barriers faced by particular age groups when delivering education and violence prevention initiatives.
  - Facilitate prosocial bystander behaviour by young people in the workplace. For example, it is important to:
    - Address the power differential in employment by ensuring safe protocols that encourage, support and respond appropriately to speaking out against disrespect and sexism in the workplace.
    - Upskill young people to provide them with the confidence and skills needed to act prosocially and embed training within a broader workplace and educational culture that supports prosocial behaviours in response to sexism and harassment.
  - Facilitate increased rejection of gender inequality and violence against women among older people. Interventions with older people should:
    - Consider generational or cohort effects which may have influenced older people's attitudes.
    - Consider use of outreach programs to conduct education and prevention initiatives with older Australians.
-

## Sexuality

### Key findings

Heterosexual people were consistently less likely to have “advanced” understanding and rejection of problematic attitudes. Heterosexual respondents demonstrated significantly lower understanding of violence against women compared to lesbians, and lower rejection of gender inequality and rejection of violence against women compared to lesbian; gay; bisexual or pansexual; and asexual, queer or sexuality-diverse respondents.

### Implications

- Foster more inclusive understanding of gender and sexuality. Action could be taken to:
  - Use gender-transformative approaches to challenge heteronormative expectations and norms and problematic heterosexual sex scripts.
  - Listen and learn from those in LGBTQ+ communities, who may have experience in navigating intimate relationships that do not comply with heteronormative expectations and may be able to provide insight into respectful relationships that are unrestricted by gendered roles.
  - Work collaboratively with LGBTQ+ advocates and communities to address underlying drivers of violence.

## Country of birth and English proficiency

### Key findings

People born in a non-main English-speaking country (N-MESC) and people with poor English were less likely to display “advanced” understanding and attitudes regarding violence against women. However, this effect declined with increasing English proficiency and increased time living in Australia.

### Implications

- Develop culturally and linguistically appropriate education, service and violence prevention initiatives for migrants from N-MESCs. Enhance protective factors through initiatives that:
  - provide culturally sensitive education, violence prevention, outreach and support services, including English language training.
  - co-design timely support with migrant communities.

## Formal education

### ■ Key findings

Higher formal education was consistently associated with more “advanced” attitudes towards gender inequality and violence against women. Respondents with university qualifications were significantly more likely than those with lower education levels to demonstrate stronger rejection of gender inequality, rejection of violence against women, and prosocial bystander responses.

### ■ Implications

- Use early intervention to improve understanding and attitudes regarding gender inequality and violence against women across the population. For example:
  - Provide age-appropriate educational programs early during compulsory schooling and TAFE education.
  - Provide young adult education for school leavers.
  - Continue and expand campus-based education in universities.
  - Employ public service campaigns to reach the broader population outside of educational settings.

## Main labour activity

### ■ Key findings

There were only a few significant associations involving main labour activity, generally showing stronger rejection of violence and prosocial bystander intervention by employed people.

### ■ Implications

Address unemployment stress, including masculine role stress, to reduce risk of violence-supportive attitudes and perpetration of violence.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> In addition to the general stress that can result from unemployment and financial difficulties, unemployment can also produce “masculine role stress” for men who adhere to rigid masculinity norms that men should be the main income earner for their family (Baughner & Gazmararian, 2015; Harrington et al., 2021; Kim & Luke, 2020; Syzdek & Addis, 2010; Webster et al., 2018).

## Socioeconomic status of area

### Key findings

Respondents living in areas with the lowest socioeconomic status were significantly less likely than those living in areas with the highest socioeconomic status to reject gender inequality and violence against women.

### Implications

- Address barriers to accessing services that help prevent and respond to violence in lower socioeconomic areas by taking the following actions:
  - Increase availability and uptake of material and social resources and opportunities helpful in violence prevention in lower socioeconomic areas.
  - Increase the availability and visibility of support services, including financial and housing support, in lower socioeconomic areas.

## Gender composition of occupation and social contexts

### Key findings

Women-dominated contexts were linked to higher rejection of gender inequality and violence against women whereas men-dominated contexts were linked to greater tolerance of sexist jokes.

### Implications

- Reduce gender segregation in the Australian workforce by using tools, such as the Gender Strategy Toolkit, to diagnose and address barriers to gender equality in workplaces (WGEA, 2019).
- Challenge microaggressions such as sexist humour in men-dominated contexts.
- Use gender-transformative approaches in men-dominated occupations and community groups. These approaches can be helpful in redefining and validating the many expressions of masculinity that do not require dominance over others.
- Develop workplace protocols and initiatives to facilitate safety and confidence for prosocial bystander intervention.
- Build confidence interacting respectfully with people of all genders.
- Challenge attitudes supporting hegemonic masculinity in men-dominated contexts, which encourage exaggerated stereotypical masculine traits such as aggression and men's domination.



# Conclusion

The NCAS findings provide evidence that **understanding and attitudes regarding violence against women are generally moving towards positive change**, although this change is occurring slowly.



The NCAS results identify areas where it would be particularly beneficial to focus prevention efforts to address gaps in understanding of violence against women and to transform more entrenched problematic attitudes towards this violence and gender inequality. The findings point to many opportunities across the primary prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery and healing continuum that can potentially contribute to realising the aspiration of ending violence against women and building a culture that supports safety, respect and equality for all Australians (COAG, 2022).

It is clear that these initiatives must be undertaken across the population and at all levels of society if this aspiration is to be reached. The NCAS is also a useful tool for highlighting areas where further research, evaluation and monitoring could be beneficial. For example, further investigation and analysis could provide deeper knowledge about the factors underlying problematic attitudes, as well as about the barriers and facilitators to improving these attitudes and to breaking down the culture that perpetuates violence against women.

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ANROWS

# ATTITUDES MATTER:

THE 2021  
NATIONAL  
COMMUNITY  
ATTITUDES  
TOWARDS  
VIOLENCE  
AGAINST  
WOMEN  
SURVEY

**NCAS**  
**SUMMARY**