

ANROWS

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY
to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children

WGEA Review Team – Consultation
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
PO Box 6500
CANBERRA ACT 2600
By online submission

Re: Review of the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012*

Dear WGEA Review Team

ANROWS thanks the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet for the opportunity to respond to the review of the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* (the Workplace Gender Equality Act).

ANROWS is an independent, not-for-profit company established as an initiative under Australia's *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (the National Plan). Our primary function is to provide an accessible evidence base for developments in policy and practice design for prevention and response to violence against women, nationally. Every aspect of our work is motivated by the right of women and their children to live free from violence and in safe communities. We recognise, respect and respond to diversity among women and their children, and we are committed to reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Primary (core) funding for ANROWS is jointly provided by the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments of Australia. ANROWS is also, from time to time, directly commissioned to undertake work for an individual jurisdiction, and successfully tenders for research and evaluation work. ANROWS is registered as a harm prevention charity and deductible gift recipient, governed by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission (ACNC).

The submission provided below is focused on selected questions outlined in the discussion paper. It draws on evidence from rigorous peer-reviewed research, including relevant ANROWS-funded research. This submission is not confidential. However, some information, clearly identified, is provided in confidence until the relevant research report is released in late January 2022.

We would be very pleased to assist the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet further, as required.

Yours sincerely

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Director, Evidence to Action

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Response to selected questions

5. In addition to gender, should WGEA collect other data on diversity and inclusion criteria on a mandatory basis, to enable a more nuanced analysis of men and women's experiences in the workplace? If yes, please specify criteria (e.g. cultural and linguistic diversity, disability, age, location of primary workplace). If not, why not?

Collecting diversity data will help the understanding of the impact of gender equality and intersectional drivers of violence in workplaces

ANROWS supports WGEA collecting other data on diversity and inclusion on a mandatory basis. The evidence base shows the importance of understanding that systemic social, political and economic discrimination and disadvantage influence and intersect with gender inequality. They can, in some cases, increase the frequency, severity and prevalence of violence against women.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women can experience far higher rates and more severe forms of violence (Olsen & Lovett, 2016) when gender-based violence intersects with the legacy and contemporary manifestations of colonialism, the forced removal of children, the interruption of cultural practices, and entrenched social and economic disadvantage (Our Watch, ANROWS & VicHealth, 2015).
- Culturally and linguistically diverse women, and women who have the experience of immigrating, can be subject to gender-based violence that intersects with racial discrimination, social isolation and increased dependency on their abuser (Mouzos & Makkai, 2004).
- Lesbian, bisexual, queer, intersex and gender non-binary people can find gendered inequality intersects with marginalisation based upon sexuality or perceived deviance from conservative sex and gender norms (Cox, 2015).
- Women with disability can find gender-based and ableist discrimination intersect and increase the risk of violence (Cox, 2016), particularly when they are substantially dependent upon their caregivers (Barger et al., 2009 as cited in Cox, 2015).
- Women living in rural and remote areas can find tight-knit, conservative communities potentially perpetuate a culture that accepts intimate partner sexual violence (Parkinson & Zara, 2014 as cited in Cox, 2015), which combines with isolation and a lack of services to increase the practical challenges of leaving violent situations (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2008 as cited in Cox, 2015).

Considering the impact of intersectional drivers of violence on gender inequality, in order to understand the nuances of men's, women's and non-binary people's experiences in the workplace, WGEA should collect data on a range of attributes including Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity, cultural and linguistic diversity, sexuality, age, disability, and geographic location of workplace.

Recommendation 1

Collect data on diversity and inclusion on a mandatory basis to develop a nuanced understanding of the diverse experiences in the workplace. Data to be collected should include Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity, cultural and linguistic diversity, sexuality, age, disability, and geographic location of workplace.

6. How could data be better collected and/or used by WGEA to promote and improve gender equality?

Funding evaluation work (in addition to utilising already existing data and identifying gaps yet to be addressed) will increase WGEA's access to quality data and allow it to be better (and more purposefully) collected. WGEA can draw upon the following existing ANROWS data sources and evaluation work that examines gender equality.

Utilising data from the *National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey* to promote and improve gender equality

WGEA can draw upon data collected in the [*National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey*](#) (NCAS) to measure improvements in attitudes to gender equality. The NCAS is a national population survey, conducted by ANROWS every four years, to examine Australians' understanding of and attitudes towards violence against women and what influences their understanding and attitudes, and to track progress in community knowledge and attitudes over time. It also gauges attitudes to gender equality and people's preparedness to intervene when witnessing violence or its precursors.

The results of the 2017 iteration of the NCAS were published in 2018 (Webster et al., 2018). The NCAS went into the field again this year, with results due to be published at the end of 2022. The 2017 NCAS found that although the majority of Australians support gender equality, many still do not support gender equality, particularly in their private lives. For example, many Australians hold attitudes that men should be in control of the relationship (Webster et al., 2018, p. 68). These attitudes can have negative flow-on effects on women's independence and ability to participate in other aspects of public life. For example, the attitude that the "man of the house" has the final say in who works and who stays at home to take on a greater share of parenting can impact a woman's capacity to participate in the workforce, and therefore to be economically self-sufficient. Attitudes like these are important to address because women's economic dependence on men is a continuing barrier to women seeking safety from violence (Meyer, 2012 as cited in Webster et al., 2018, p. 68).

The 2017 NCAS findings also revealed that there was room for improvement in attitudes regarding women's independence and decision-making in public life, in addressing rigid gender roles and stereotypes, and in rejecting male peer relations involving aggression and disrespect towards women.

The close link between problematic attitudes towards gender equality and attitudes condoning violence against women demonstrates the importance of addressing these attitudes towards gender equality by strengthening prevention policy and practice design. As such, the data from the NCAS findings could help to develop training tools in workplaces to promote and improve gender equality and for workplaces to better understand the links between gender equality and violence against women.

Identifying the gaps in the existing data as they relate to diverse communities

ANROWS research, [*Invisible women, invisible violence: Understanding and improving data on the experiences of domestic and family violence and sexual assault for diverse groups of women: State of knowledge*](#), reviewed knowledge of and data on the experiences of violence among diverse women in Australia. The review identified the following gaps in the information: limitations in quantitative evidence on the prevalence and perpetration of violence; the complexity and specificity of violence; multiple, intersecting barriers to reporting violence and accessing appropriate services; and "diversity within diversity" – the intersections of identity and disadvantage (Mitra-Kahn, 2016). The research found

that the following improvements could be made to research into diverse women experiencing violence including:

1. augmenting and enhancing existing surveys and administrative data
2. addressing definitional complexities in data and the specificity of the diverse experiences of violence
3. addressing data quality and accessibility
4. providing a consolidated and coordinated approach to data collection
5. facilitating the better use of existing data for the creation of new statistical information.

ANROWS's evaluation work

ANROWS undertakes a range of evaluation research activities with diverse stakeholders in the violence against women sector.

ANROWS is also able to draw on our NCAS experience to create bespoke gender equality data collection tools for WGEA. An example of one such tool was developed for the Office for Women in the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet. ANROWS collaborated with the University of Melbourne and the Social Research Centre to develop a validated and standardised evaluation survey instrument for primary prevention projects to track project-level and state-wide changes in knowledge of and attitudes toward family violence, gender equality and bystander interventions.

The questionnaire drew on items from the [National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey](#) (NCAS), the Personal Safety Survey (PSS), and OurWatch's Workplace Equality and Respect materials. It also included bespoke items developed for this survey through consultation with key stakeholders, covering family violence involving women with disabilities, older women, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and LGBTIQ+ communities.

ANROWS is currently supporting the action research evaluation of Victoria University's "Gender Equality through Employability Skills" project. The project aims to promote more inclusive, respectful and diverse workplaces through applied research on gender equality and employability skills in VET trades contexts. When developed, the approach used in this action research evaluation could inform the way WGEA collects data to improve and promote gender equality.

Recommendation 2

Engage ANROWS to develop bespoke gender equality data collection tools for WGEA using NCAS data to highlight violence-supportive attitudes so workplaces can create resources to support improvements in problem areas.

Recommendation 3

Address the gaps in the existing data as they relate to diverse women who experience domestic and family violence.

Recommendation 4

Build an evaluation mechanism into the Workplace Gender Equality Act, where an independent body such as ANROWS is funded to evaluate the way data is collected and gender equality is promoted.

10. Are there any other matters you want to comment on in relation to the Workplace Gender Equality Act and improving and promoting gender equality in the workplace in Australia?

Understanding the impact that domestic and family violence has on workplaces

Research highlights the importance of sustained periods of employment in order for women to have financial security and a crucial pathway to escaping violence. In particular, ANROWS research shows that industrial entitlements, like paid domestic violence leave, are important for minimising the disruption to incomes when women end violent relationships. Paid domestic violence leave may also reduce the adverse financial impact of violence on women (Cortis & Bullen, 2016). The inclusion of mandatory paid domestic violence leave would help to improve and promote gender equality in the workplace.

An ANROWS resource, [*Paid domestic and family violence \(DFV\) leave: Summary of the evidence*](#), captures the key insights from ANROWS-funded and external research on the impact of DFV on the workplace including the benefits of the leave and what the employer can do to support employees experiencing domestic and family violence. The provision of this paid domestic and family violence leave is also an opportunity for workplaces to engage in conversations around domestic and family violence.

Intersection of economic insecurity and intimate partner violence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

In forthcoming ANROWS research, [*outlined here in confidence until its publication in late January 2022*](#), 10,000 women living in Australia were asked about their experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) during the first 12 months of the pandemic. The study found that the prevalence of economic insecurity among victims and survivors indicates that many women who experience IPV may require economic security in order to leave violent relationships. Economic security includes stable housing, income support, debt forgiveness, microloans and access to affordable childcare options if women choose to enter the workforce. Additionally, the study found that financial stress was associated with first-time physical and sexual violence in previously non-abusive relationships – rather than repeat violence – while job loss or lost work was associated with first-time and escalating violence (Morgan & Boxall, in press). This highlights the importance of implementing measures that can alleviate financial stress to reduce the likelihood that it will lead to violence.

The study also shows that economic disparity between partners was linked with recent experiences of IPV. It was found that women who were the main income earners, were employed when their partner was not, or had access to financial savings that their partner did not, were more likely to experience IPV. This shows that improving gender equality for women should not only focus on improving the economic status of women but that policies and reforms should also address the harmful gender norms and dismantle the systems that enable these problematic stereotypes (Morgan & Boxall, in press).

The study importantly also found that the economic stressors associated with the COVID-19 pandemic were associated with both the onset and escalation of IPV. This highlights the importance of responses to lessen the economic consequences of the pandemic (Morgan & Boxall, in press).

ANROWS-funded research on sexual harassment

In September 2021, ANROWS opened a competitive grants round for its [*2021–2024 Sexual Harassment Research Program*](#) (with funds provided to ANROWS by the Australian Government Department of Social Services). The grants round has now closed. Funded projects will commence in early 2022 and be completed no later than February 2024.

The research program was created in response to Recommendation 4 of the *Respect@Work* report, which identified priorities for research relating to sexual harassment. The research program will build the evidence base on sexual harassment in the Australian context and contribute to the development of policies and programs for workplaces, public spaces and online. The research program aims to expand understanding of the sexual violence continuum, demonstrating the nature of sexual harassment as a form of sexual violence as well as responding to identified research gaps under *Australia's National Research Agenda to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (ANRA) 2020–2022*. Selected research projects will support workplaces, policymakers and justice reform to address cultural and systemic change to effectively address and reduce sexual harassment in an Australian context.

Recommendation 5

Include mandatory paid domestic violence leave, as supported by the evidence base, to improve and promote gender equality in the workplace and assist women to be able to leave violence relationships. This includes supporting employers in the rollout of paid domestic and family violence leave with resources for managing workplace conversations about domestic and family violence.

Recommendation 6

Ensure that any legislative reform to lessen financial stress applies a gendered lens. Simultaneously, work to improve harmful gender norms to reduce the likelihood that it will lead to violence in times of financial stress.

Recommendation 7

Draw from the evidence base, particularly ANROWS's forthcoming research program on sexual harassment, to expand the understanding of the prevalence and impact of sexual violence in Australian workplaces.

Summary of Recommendations

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