



## Addressing sexual harassment in Victorian workplaces

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**Jesuit  
Social Services**  
Building a Just Society

*We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of all the lands on which Jesuit Social Services operates and pay respect to their Elders past and present. We express our gratitude for their love and care of people, community, land and all life.*

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Department of Justice and Community Safety's (DJCS) consultation on addressing sexual harassment in Victorian workplaces. Our submission will address the consultation areas – **preventing sexual harassment** and **supporting workers to report**, while also providing broader input. We welcome the Victorian Government's commitment to implementing critical reforms that will prevent and better respond to sexual harassment in workplaces.

## 1. About Jesuit Social Services

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation. We work with the most disadvantaged members of the community, providing services and advocacy in the areas of justice and crime prevention; mental health and well-being; settlement and community building; education, training and employment; and gender and ecological justice.

We have been working with boys and men for over 40 years. This work has included engaging with boys and men involved in the criminal justice system, including those leaving prison; establishing Victoria's first dedicated counselling service working with young people struggling with concurrent mental health and substance abuse problems; and the Support After Suicide program which provides free individual and family counselling to people bereaved by suicide and runs a specialist men's group.

Many of the boys and men we work with use violence, and we see many of them hold harmful attitudes towards girls and women. Our work with men who have committed serious violent and sex offences seeks, upon release from prison, a successful transition back into the community to lower the risk of recidivism and improve community safety.

Drawing from our experience, [The Men's Project](#) has been established to provide leadership and develop new approaches to reducing violence and other harmful behaviours prevalent among boys and men to improve their wellbeing, and to keep families and communities safe. The Men's Project incorporates a range of initiatives across three areas of work, namely to:

1. Promote cultural and attitudinal change around issues of masculinity and gender to support primary prevention of violence efforts including building workforce capacity.
2. Design, pilot and evaluate targeted early interventions to address violence and other harmful behaviours that address significant gaps in the service system.
3. Produce and share knowledge about the attitudes of men and boys including how these attitudes impact behaviours.

## 2. Jesuit Social Services' understanding of gendered drivers of violence

Gender inequality includes the power imbalance generated as a consequence of narrow gender norms and stereotypes, thereby, limiting individuals and groups of both men and women from living safe, healthy and fulfilling lives where they can reach their full potential. Gendered norms, practices and structures influence individual beliefs and behaviours across the individual, organisational, systemic and broader societal levels<sup>1</sup>.

Gender norms and expectations are drivers of the high rates of violence against women perpetrated by men. These norms also have a detrimental impact on men and boys. Research, including our Man Box reports outlined below, has shown that men who conform to dominant masculine norms (that men should be tough, stoic, dominant and in control) are more likely to engage in risky behaviours and less likely to engage in health promotion behaviours<sup>2</sup>. The rigid adherence to gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity is considered to be a gendered driver that underpins sexual harassment which is a form of gender-based violence<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], (2020). Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces, Australian Human Rights Commission: Sydney.

<sup>2</sup> Our Watch., (2019). Men in focus: unpacking masculinities and engaging men in the prevention of violence against women, Our Watch: Melbourne, Australia.; The Men's Project & Flood, M., (2018). The Man Box: A Study on Being a Young Man in Australia. Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2020

## The Man Box

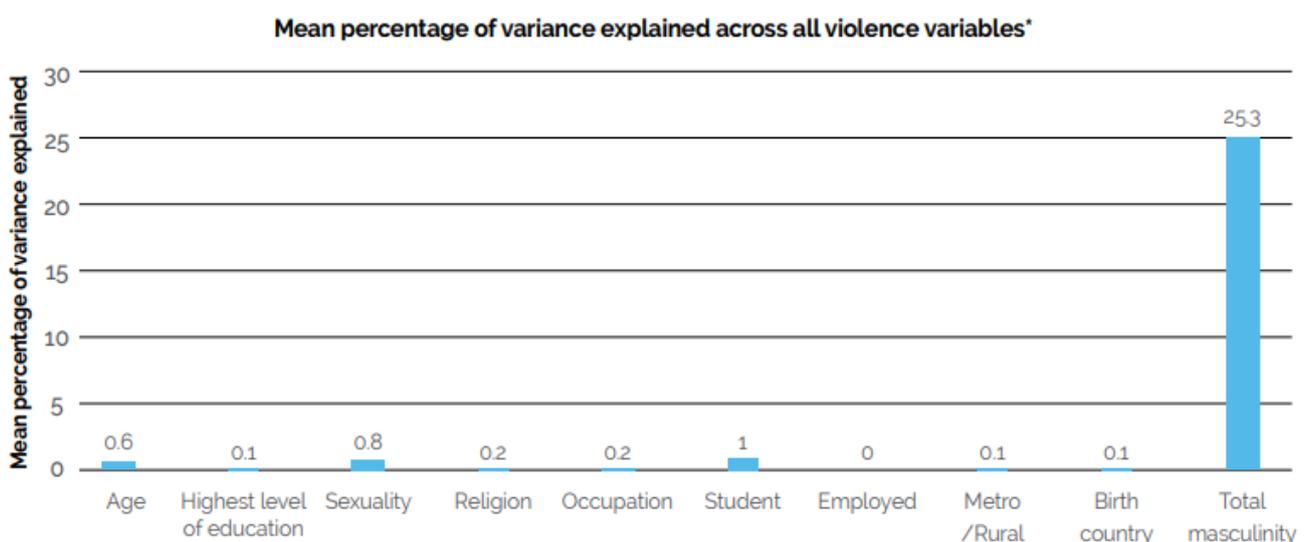
Our [Man Box study](#) on being a young man in Australia was the first comprehensive study that focused on attitudes to manhood and the behaviours of young Australian men aged 18 to 30. The findings shed a new light on the social pressures that young Australian men experience to be a ‘real man’ and the impact this can have on their wellbeing, behaviours and the safety of our wider community<sup>4</sup>.

We undertook a survey of 1,000 randomly selected young Australian men focusing on men’s attitudes and behaviours in relation to a set of questions about gender. To do this work we used an analytical tool, the Man Box, to understand the impact of strongly adhering to stereotypical ideas of masculinity. The Man Box attitudes are a set of stereotypical beliefs within society that place pressure on men to act in a certain way. The attitudes fall under seven pillars including self-sufficiency, acting tough, physical attractiveness, rigid masculine gender roles, hyper sexuality, heterosexuality and homophobia and aggression and control.

We found that the endorsement of masculine norms strongly correlated with a range of adverse outcomes and harmful attitudes and behaviours. Specifically, men who held such beliefs were 20 times more likely to self-report sexually harassing a woman, 14 times more likely to self-report the use of physical violence and over twice as likely to experience suicidal thoughts<sup>5</sup>. For instance, with regards to suicidal thoughts, of those with the highest Man Box score (top 20%) almost two-thirds self-reported having suicidal thoughts in the last two weeks compared to 27% with the lowest Man Box score.

A further report, Unpacking the Man Box, built on these initial findings by understanding, through regression analysis, the unique contribution of the Man Box and its pillars to the well-being of young men. It found that conforming to Man Box norms had a stronger impact than demographic variables (education levels, where someone lives, or their cultural heritage) on predicting harmful outcomes, attitudes or behaviours<sup>6</sup>. Specifically, outdated attitudes related to gender were 25 times more likely to predict the use of physical violence, sexual harassment, verbal and cyber bullying<sup>7</sup>.

**Figure 3. Average percentage of variance explained by the Total Masculinity Score and demographic variables for the use of violence**



\* Violence variables include perpetration and experience of physical violence, verbal and online bullying, as well as perpetration of sexual harassment of women.

<sup>4</sup> The Men’s Project & Flood, 2018

<sup>5</sup> The Men’s Project & Flood, 2018

<sup>6</sup> The Men’s Project & Flood, M., (2020). Unpacking the Man Box: What is the impact of the Man Box attitudes on young Australian men’s behaviours and wellbeing? Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne.

<sup>7</sup> The Men’s Project & Flood, 2020

Figure 1 shows that personal endorsement of masculine norms is an important contributor to engagement and experience of violence, bullying and sexual harassment of women, given that it contributes a substantial amount of variance (25%), on average, across all violence variables. Put another way, Man Box attitudes are a better predictor of whether someone will use violence than the demographic variables. With regards to sexual harassment specifically, 27% of the variance is explained by Man Box norms.

### 3. Prevention

#### ***How can we help employers identify and prevent sexual harassment in workplaces? Do we need a different approach for smaller employers?***

There is a compelling need to address the root causes of harmful behaviours such as violence, gendered violence, sexism and sexual harassment. The best available evidence suggests a key way to achieve this is through primary prevention efforts that promote cultural and attitudinal change related to masculinities and gender. Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins' report *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces* echoes this and advocates for strategies that promote gender equality by recognising and shifting the gendered drivers that underpin sexual harassment<sup>8</sup>.

Key to primary prevention efforts is investment in research to better understand the behaviours and attitudes of men and boys in relation to The Man Box norms as well as the associated links to the use of violence and sexual harassment. While there is increasing attention on preventing violence by engaging with men and boys, there is limited data on their attitudes and how these attitudes impact behaviour. Jesuit Social Services would welcome the opportunity to be part of a longitudinal approach to Man Box data collection to track progress over time.

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#### **Recommendation 1: Invest in research to better understand the behaviours and attitudes in workplaces in relation to The Man Box norms including links to sexual harassment.**

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Schools settings are key for primary prevention providing an opportunity to critically engage with masculine stereotypes, gender norms and gender inequality. We strongly believe that prevention work in schools that focuses on respectful relationships and recognises that gender-based violence is driven by gender inequality will lead to better outcomes later in a number of different contexts including the workplace.

Our **Man Box in Schools** approach is a strengths-based, healthier masculinities education model designed to support young people to be their best selves. With each school, our approach takes a four phased strategy, including:

- Baseline – Understand attitudes and behaviours
- Plan – Map current initiatives and co-design approach
- Act – Enable delivery of program/curriculum
- Assess – Measure impact and consider next steps

To drive this work, we have designed a series of **Unpacking the Man Box workshops**. The sessions encourage conversations amongst students, teaching staff, and their wider school communities about the negative consequences associated with gender stereotypes and the tools and resources to foster healthier forms of masculinities, respectful relationships, and positive wellbeing. Our work is aligned with the consistent with the Victorian Government's Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships curriculum. We commend the Victorian Government on the progress they have made implementing this curriculum in schools.

We have also adapted these sessions to other contexts including workplaces, early childhood education, justice and maternal and child health settings. We deliver the workshops to a range of participants, namely

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<sup>8</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2020

social workers, well-being staff, teachers, students, faith leaders and parents. Evaluation of Unpacking the Man Box workshops found participants reported a number of beneficial outcomes, namely:

- understanding that the behaviour among men and boys is driven by the Man Box rules and society's promotion of these rules;
- understanding the importance of adopting healthier ways of being a male;
- increased level of knowledge and confidence in getting out of the Man Box;
- increased insights into strategies/ activities that will bring about change in the attitudes and behaviours of men and boys;
- the importance of role modelling in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of men and boys;
- wanting to know more about how to work with men and boys to assist them in their development.

Research and practice expertise suggest that role models – both male and female – in the places where boys and men live, work, and meet are crucial to prevention efforts. Jesuit Social Services has developed the **Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) program** to support role models who interact with boys and men on a regular basis so they can challenge limiting and harmful stereotypes and promote respect and equality towards women. The program supports participants to develop greater self-awareness of masculine norms and their impact, learn how to model and promote positive change, and recognise and challenge problematic attitudes and behaviours. Participants include teachers, social workers, sports coaches, leaders in workplaces, and leaders in faith communities. While some larger workplaces could fund this themselves, smaller workforces are likely to need government funding to support these efforts. Evaluation of MoRE found significant change in the level of knowledge, confidence, and motivation to bring about change among the men and boys that the participants worked with.

Key to helping employers identify and prevent sexual harassment is building workforce capacity to engage on issues related to the Man Box norms with a focus on working with men in sectors related to gender-based harassment, violence and sexual harassment prevention. We believe that our Man Box in Schools model could be adapted by employers to better help identify and prevent gender-based and sexual harassment in workplaces.

#### **Baseline – Understand attitudes and behaviours**

Our research has demonstrated that personal endorsement of stereotypical masculine norms is self-reported and measurable. This serves as an opportunity for employers to survey their staff through our Man Box survey to better understand the attitudes and behaviours of their employees.

#### **Plan – Map current initiatives and co-design approach**

Phase two involves a series of focus groups, consultations including workshops and one-on-ones and focus groups aiming to identify existing initiatives such a training that influence (enhance or hinder) the attitudes and behaviours of employees with regard to respect, equality, gender-based violence and sexual harassment.

#### **Act – Enable delivery of program**

Phases one and two combined will identify opportunities to further promote healthy masculinities in each workplace and will be used to develop a strategy for action. This may involve recommendations for new initiatives developed and delivered by The Men's Project, or other organisations, as well as adaptations and adjustments of initiatives and structures that already exist within the workplace. Example initiatives include:

- Equip leadership staff and well-being staff with the awareness, knowledge and resources to engage with staff to adopt healthy masculinities through interactive workshops;
- Direct education to staff on masculinities and its impact on violence, risk taking and mental health through our MoRE program.

#### **Assess – Measure impact and consider next steps**

Finally, a crucial component will be to assess and improve the initiatives that are being delivered, as well as evaluate any shifts or changes in attitudes and behaviours. This can be done through administering to staff a

feedback survey, our Man Box Survey and consultations including workshops and one-on-one. Through this process, the most effective strategies will become apparent and incorporated on an ongoing. Ultimately, this will allow each workplace to establish a workplace culture that supports staff to confidently understand and demonstrate healthy masculinities, and model respect and equality.

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**Recommendation 2: Invest in workforce capacity building to engage on issues related to the Man Box with a focus on working with men to prevent gender-based harassment, violence and sexual harassment.**

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***What can we do to make sure prevention activities target high risk industries and at-risk groups?***

The construction sector has been identified as one of the highest occupational risk sectors in Australia<sup>9</sup>. Mental health in the construction industry continues to be a prevalent issue within today's society, with many workers suffering from depression, engaging in risk-taking behaviours, and being both victims and perpetrators of bullying and sexual harassment within the workplace. Women in the construction industry fall victim to gendered violence in the workplace<sup>10</sup>, this often drives women to resign from their jobs, with women leaving the construction industry 38% faster than men<sup>11</sup>.

Rigid adherence to stereotypical ideas about what it means to be a man are also prevalent amongst male dominant industries such as mining and, as a result, this impacts upon workplace culture including greater risk taking behaviour<sup>12</sup>. Within the construction industry, there is evidence of an acceptance and tolerance of sexist behaviours, that often goes unnoticed and unaddressed<sup>13</sup>. This type of behaviour manifests in a culture that normalises traditional masculinity.

There is significant research examining the incidence of sexual harassment (unwelcomed sexual advances) in male-dominated industries. We seek to also highlight the issue of gender-based harassment which refers to harassment that is not necessarily sexual in nature, but is targeted at individuals, or a group of individuals, because of their sex or gender<sup>14</sup>. Gender harassment is much less overt than sexual harassment whereby women are made to feel unwelcome and seen to offend by their mere presence. Foley suggests that gender harassment indicates to women that they are outsiders and will never be 'one of the boys'<sup>15</sup>.

We commend the Victorian Government for including 'Gender equality within Victorian Government suppliers' as a key outcome under *Victoria's Social Procurement Framework*. Given women are increasingly being encouraged to participate in traditionally masculine industries, there must be greater action aimed at addressing hypermasculinity, preventing sexual and gender-based harassment and addressing their impacts on women and the workplace culture more generally.

We would welcome opportunities to develop partnerships with employers that seek to engage men and women as agents of change by supporting them to challenge harmful gender norms and male stereotypes as well as equipping them to promote and model respect and equality. Critical themes underpinning this work include: addressing gender equality in the workplace; female workforce participation (by addressing sexual harassment); bullying on site; mental health; substance use; rigid gender roles including men in care giving roles; and the use of violence – towards both men and women. A key foundation to this work would be training to all staff around the limitations of The Man Box and facilitating the adoption of more positive ways of

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<sup>9</sup> Ross, V., Caton, N., Gullestrup, J., Kloves, K. (2020). A Longitudinal Assessment of Two Suicide Prevention Training Programs for the Construction Industry. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

<sup>10</sup> Laplonge & Albury, 2013

<sup>11</sup> Victoria Government (2019). *Victoria's Women in Construction Strategy*.

<sup>12</sup> Laplonge, D., (2011). *Telling Tales of Safety to men in Mining: Draft Research Article*.

<sup>13</sup> Galea, N., Powell, A. (2018). *Women in construction: government can do more to shake up the boys club*. ABC new.

<sup>14</sup> Foley, M., Oxenbridge, S., Cooper, R., & Baird, M. (2020). 'I'll never be one of the boys': Gender harassment of women working as pilots and automotive tradespeople. *Gender, Work & Organization*.

<sup>15</sup> Foley et al., 2020

engaging with themselves and the people in their lives. Not only does this work aim to create a more equal workplace through the education of gendered norms and their consequences, but also a more inclusive and equitable environment which recognises the impact of rigid forms of masculinities on women both in the workplace and at home.

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**Recommendation 3: Prioritise investment for initiatives delivered in high risk workplaces that seek to raise awareness of and challenge gendered norms to create inclusive and equitable environments.**

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## 4. Support

### ***How can we make it easier for people to report sexual harassment in the workplace?***

New research has found that men who are anxious about not living up to the expectations of being a man are less likely to intervene following a sexist remark at work. The *Masculine Anxiety and Interrupting Sexism at Work* research showed that more than a quarter of the men surveyed (28 per cent) said that they would likely do nothing if they witnessed sexist remarks in the workplace.

Masculine anxiety – distress men feel when they do not think they are living up to society’s rigid standards of masculinity – was a major factor inhibiting men from calling out sexist remarks. The research found that 76 per cent of men who experience masculine anxiety indicated that they would do nothing if they witness sexism in the workplace, compared to 14 per cent who reported having a lesser degree of masculine anxiety<sup>16</sup>. These findings indicate that harmful masculine norms and beliefs inhibit bystanders from reporting sexism in the workplace. Interventions that improve staff awareness, knowledge and understanding around the harm caused by masculine stereotypes on men, women and society more broadly, can facilitate a workplace culture and environment that supports people to report sexist behaviours.

The *Respect@Work* inquiry found that most people who experience sexual harassment never report it. For this reason, workplaces must ensure that the onus of reporting does not solely lie with those who have been the subject of sexism and sexual harassment. Workplaces should rather strive to create a safe and supportive workplace culture where gender equality and reporting sexism are collective goals and actions.

Staff training and development that allows for education around the impacts of the Man Box, facilitating open and respectful discussions highlighting intersectionality is essential in creating a supportive and safe workplace culture that encourages reporting. Policies and procedures that clarify expectations are important, but must work in concert with initiatives and training to develop a supportive and safe workplace environment. Further to this, workplaces where staff in leadership roles embody and display strong gender equality values are crucial for creating and maintaining a positive workplace culture.

While creating a supportive environment to enable reporting is critical, as the *Respect@Work* inquiry heard, we must shift from the current reactive, complaints-based approach, to one which requires positive actions from employers with a focus on prevention.

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**Recommendation 4: Implementation of staff training and development around the impacts of the Man Box to promote a supportive and safe workplace culture that encourages reporting.**

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<sup>16</sup> DiMuccio, S., Sattari, N., Shaffer, E., & Cline, J. (2021). *Masculine anxiety and interrupting sexism at work*. Catalyst.