

Attachment: Reference list for myths, stereotypes and misunderstandings and realities

✖ **Myth 1: “*Choosing*” to Stay in Relationships’** ... A victim-survivor is able to leave the relationship.

✓ **REALITIES:** Many victim-survivors will want to leave – however research shows they face a ‘myriad of barriers’ to leaving violent relationships such that the ‘stay/leave binary’ is rarely applicable.

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✖ **Myth 2: ‘Separation Ends the Violence’** ... The violence will stop when the victim-survivor and perpetrator separate

✓ **REALITIES:** Research has shown that one of the most dangerous times for a victim-survivor is in the months after separation when the perpetrator may use a variety of tactics to reassert control over the victim-survivor.

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✖ **Myth 3: ‘But He Doesn’t Hit You?’** ... Family violence involving physical violence is more serious than other controlling behaviours

✓ **REALITIES:** Research indicates that the majority of women who experience family violence report that the most difficult form of abuse is non-physical, especially emotional abuse, which has deep impacts on sense of self and freedom and long-lasting effects. Such types of violence are often pre-cursors to intimate partner homicide.

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✖ **Myth 4: ‘It’s Not My Fault! Alcohol, Drugs etc are to Blame’** ... Family violence is caused by external factors, such as alcohol or drug use, financial pressures or a prejudicial family law system

✓ **REALITIES: Perpetrators commonly minimise family violence by attempting to shift the blame to the victim-survivor and others. Although some research shows that alcohol and drugs can be correlated with the occurrence of family violence; correlation does not equal causation. For example, there is no evidence that alcohol use is a primary cause of violence against women. Violence occurs in the absence of these factors, and there are many situations where these factors are present, without violence occurring.**

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✖ **Myth 5: ‘DV is Cultural’** ... Family violence only affects particular groups of people

✓ **REALITIES:** Research shows that family violence happens in all parts of society, regardless of race, gender, age, sexual identity, socio-economic status, location, culture or religion. Some groups of people are more vulnerable to experiencing violence, and its effects due to their circumstances or needs, or can face barriers to seeking help.

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✖ **Myth 6: ‘Men Suffer DV as Much as Women’** ... Men and women are equally victim-survivors and perpetrators of family violence

✓ **REALITIES:** The greatest threat to the health of, and risk of premature death for, women aged between 15 and 44 years is family violence and family violence is most often perpetrated by men against women. The nature and consequences of men’s violence are significantly different from women’s violence.

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✖ **Myth 7: ‘Sexual Assaults are Not DV’** ... Family violence does not include sexual assault

✓ **REALITIES:** Research shows that women’s experiences of family violence include sexual assault, for example, often co-occurring with coercive control. For women who experience sexual assault, in the majority of cases it is a sexual assault by a man they know, most commonly an intimate partner. Many victim-survivors do not report or even make disclosures about sexual assault, even when reporting other forms of violence.

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✖ **Myth 8: ‘*She’s Making It Up!*’** ... Women often make false or exaggerated claims to obtain a tactical advantage in parenting proceedings

✓ **REALITIES:** There is no research to suggest that women make false or exaggerated claims of family violence to get an advantage in court cases about parenting. Research shows that family violence is under-reported, and barriers to reporting, include fear of not being believed. People who have used violence often deny or minimise family violence, with false denials of true allegations more common than false allegations of family violence.

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✖ **Myth 9: ‘DV is just a “Toxic” relationship’** ... Family violence is a relationship issue or caused by dysfunctional relationships; both parties are responsible

✓ **REALITIES:** Research shows that perpetrators attempt to shift the blame to another source, often ‘mutualising’ violence or labelling it as ordinary difficulties in relationships. They can also focus on the violence being unique to ‘this’ relationship and the ‘behaviour’ of their partner, implying that the next relationship will be different and without violence. For a myriad of complex reasons, victim-survivors may accept blame for the violence or return to violent relationships. Violence in relationships is almost always underpinned by an underlying dynamic of coercive control. Research shows that both prior offending and reoffending are common among family violence offenders.

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✖ **Myth 10: ‘Only “Weak” Women are Victims of DV’** ... Victim-survivors of family violence are weak, passive or powerless

✓ **REALITIES:** Victim-survivors and their circumstances and experiences of violence are as diverse as people in the broader population. There is no particular ‘type’ of victim-survivor or typical way of responding. People of any class, culture, religion, sexual orientation, marital status and age can be victim-survivors or perpetrators of family violence. Research with victim-survivors about their experiences demonstrates their strength and resilience in overcoming adversity.

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✖ **Myth 11: ‘DV Should be Endured to Keep the Family Together’** ... Mothers who experience family violence have a duty to keep the family together and to protect children from violence

✓ **REALITIES:** The risk of harm is not static and confined to the status of the relationship or family unit. A victim-survivor may be constantly reassessing the risk of harm to herself and her children and balancing complex and competing factors but is not responsible for the violence of the perpetrator. Despite this, a victim-survivor’s sense of duty to protect children from further harm may directly influence decisions to leave, which can in turn potentially threaten her own safety and that of her children.

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✖ **Myth 12: ‘*The Kids are All Right!*’** ... Family violence that is not directed at children does not impact them

✓ **REALITIES:** A significant number of Australian children are exposed to violence; perpetrated most often against their mother by their father or their mother’s current or former male partner. Research shows that infants, children and adolescents experience serious negative psychological, emotional, social, and developmental impacts to their well-being from the traumatic ongoing experiences of violence. Children do not need to see or hear the family violence to be exposed to it.

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