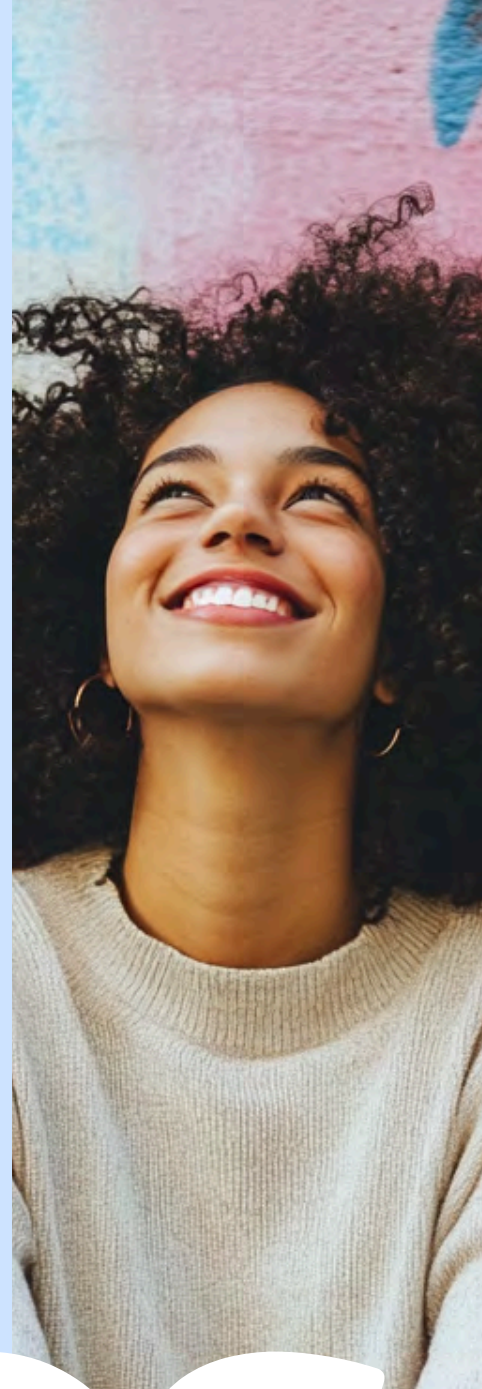
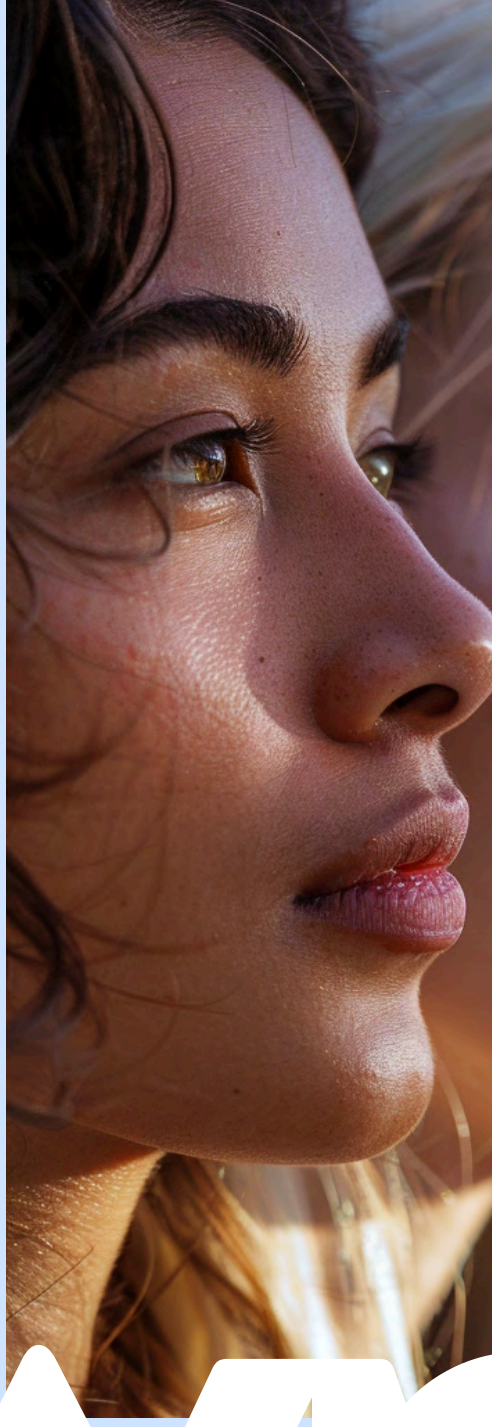




YOUNG WOMEN'S ALLIANCE
AUSTRALIA

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INTRODUCTION	8
HOW TO READ YWPS	12
GLOSSARY OF TERMS	13
KEY TERMS: GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE	13
OTHER KEY TERMS	15
LIST OF ACRONYMS	15
METHODOLOGY	17
THEORY OF CHANGE	21
Theory of Change: Summary Model	25
YOUNG WOMEN MAP	27
YOUNG MEN MAP	28
ANALYSIS OF EXISTING POLICY LANDSCAPE	29
1.1 Literature Review	29
1.1.1 Federal Frameworks and Policy	29
1.1.2 State and Territory Frameworks and Policy	35
1.2 Effectiveness of Current Policy in Addressing Young Women’s Issues	40
MAP TO WORKING FOR WOMEN	46
AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY	47
2.1 The Situation	47
2.1.1 General Attitudes Towards Gender Equality	48
2.1.2 Violence and Gender Roles	48
2.1.3 Economic and Leadership Challenges	49
2.1.4 Mental Health and Well-being	50
2.2 Primary Research	50
2.2.1 Survey Findings	50
2.2.1.1 Contributing Factors - Men are Better than Women	50
2.2.1.2 Intersection of Gender & Australian Society	53
2.2.1.3 Solution Preferences of Men with High & Low Perpetration of GBV	54
2.2.2 Interview Insights	56
2.2.2.1 Theme 1: Persistent Gender Inequality and Societal Expectations	57
2.2.2.2 Theme 2: The Role of Education and Early Intervention	58
2.2.2.3 Theme 3: Media Influence and Representation	60
2.2.2.4 Theme 4: Cultural Change and Societal Attitudes	62
2.2.3 Literature Review	64
2.3 Policy Recommendations	67

2.3.1 Incentive-Based Innovation Platform for Gender Justice	67
2.3.2 Enhancing the AANA Code of Ethics Regarding Gender Representation in Advertising	74
2.3.3 Enhancing the AANA Children’s Advertising Code Regarding Gender Representation in Advertising	75
2.3.4 Adding Gender Stereotype Assessment to Screen Australia’s Evaluation	77
2.3.5 Social Media Regulation for Online Safety and Gender Justice in Australia	78
FAMILY/ FRIENDS	81
3.1 The Situation	81
3.1.1 Educational Attainment and Career Opportunities	82
3.1.2 Social and Emotional Support	82
3.1.3 Impact of Motherhood	82
3.1.4 Health and Wellbeing	82
3.1.5 Household Responsibilities	83
3.1.6 Navigating Gendered Disadvantage	83
3.2 Primary Research	83
3.2.1 Survey Findings	83
3.2.2 Interview Insights	84
3.3 Policy Recommendations	85
3.3.1 Life Course Credit System	85
3.3.2 Parents’ Guidebook	87
EDUCATION	90
4.1 The Situation	90
4.1.1 Confidence and Self-Perception Decline	91
4.1.2 Early Exposure to Sexual Abuse	91
4.1.3 Gendered Mental Health Struggles	92
4.1.4 STEM Career Aspirations & Early Gender Bias	92
4.1.5 Digital Harassment	93
4.2 Primary Research	93
4.2.1 Survey Findings	94
4.2.2 Interview Insights	95
4.2.2.1 Theme 1: Importance of Life Skills Education	96
4.2.2.2 Theme 2: University Experience and Gender Dynamics	97
4.2.2.3 Theme 3: Educational Inequality and Socioeconomic Factors	99
4.2.2.4 Theme 4: Transition from High School to University	101
4.2.2.5 Theme 5: Need for Financial Education in Schools	103
4.2.2.6 Theme 6: Support for Students with Disabilities	105

4.4 Policy Recommendations	106
4.4.1 Sliding Scale Tuition Policy for Disadvantaged Students	106
4.4.2 Online Education Support Scheme for Primary School Students	109
4.4.3 Gendered Deradicalisation	111
4.4.4. Gender De-biasing Australian Textbooks	114
4.4.5 Educational Interventions to Mitigate GBV Perpetration & Exposure	116
SAFETY/RELATIONSHIPS/SEX/GBV	118
5.2 The Situation	119
5.2.1 Violence Against Women	119
5.2.2 Dangerous Beliefs	120
5.2.3 Sexual Experiences and Well-being	120
5.2.4 Impact of Pornography	121
5.3 Primary Research	122
5.3.1 Survey Findings	122
5.3.1.1 Sex Life	122
5.3.1.2 Relationships	123
5.3.1.3 Solution Preferences of Women	125
5.3.1.4 GBV Risk Profile	127
5.3.1.5 Original Time Progressions of GBV	132
5.3.1.6 Correlations Among Composite Scores of Male Attitudes and Behaviour	147
5.3.2 Interview Insights	151
5.3.2.1 Prevalence of Sexual Assault and/or Violence	151
5.3.2.2 Theme 1: GBV and Harassment	152
5.3.2.3 Theme 2: Safety Concerns in Public and Educational Spaces	154
5.3.2.4 Theme 3: Challenges in Relationships and Dating*	156
5.3.2.5 Theme 4: Consent Education and Cultural Change	158
5.4 Policy Recommendations	160
5.4.1 Specific inclusions in Consent and Respectful Relationships Education (CRRE)	160
Intervention Point 1: Preventing IPV Onset	161
Intervention Point 2: Cognitive Dissonance and Value Reassessment Workshops	162
Intervention Point 3: Teaching Emotional Regulation to Young Men to Prevent IPV	164
Intervention Point 4: Providing a Model of Masculinity	164
Intervention Point 5: Incorporating Grey Zones in GBV into CRRE	165
Intervention Point 6: Sexual Assertiveness Training in CRRE	166
5.4.2 Targeted Social Media Campaign to Challenge Gender Equality Misconceptions Among At-Risk Young Men	167

5.4.3 Develop a National Agenda for Research and Action → Establish a Central Funding Register → Engage Philanthropic Organisations → Standardised Monitoring and Evaluation	168
Recommendation Details:	169
1. Develop a National Agenda for Research and Action	169
2. Establish a Central Funding Register	169
3. Engage Philanthropic Organisations	169
4. Standardised Monitoring and Evaluation	169
5.4.4 Modern Relationships Essay Series: Curriculum Integration	170
5.4.5 NSW MBCP Funding & Trial Program	171
5.4.6 Designing Your Life Courses	176
5.4.7 Life Transition Support for Young Women	178
5.4.8 Implementing Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) Test in Educational and Community Settings	181
SELF ESTEEM	184
6.1 The Situation	184
6.1.1 Self Esteem	184
6.2 Primary Research	185
6.2.1 Survey Findings	185
6.2.2 Interview Insights	187
6.3 Policy Recommendations	187
6.3.1 Women’s Book & TikTok Series	187
6.3.2 Embedding Life and Humanist Philosophy in Education Systems	190
6.3.3 Regulating Influencer Content to Protect Young Women and Girls	192
HEALTH	197
7.1 The Situation	197
7.2 Primary Research	199
7.2.1 Survey Findings	199
7.2.2 Interview Insights	203
7.2.2.1 Theme 1: Mental Health Challenges	203
7.2.2.2 Theme 2: Access to Healthcare	205
7.2.2.3 Theme 3: Women's Health, Reproductive Autonomy, and Chronic Pain Management	206
7.2.2.4 Theme 4: Doctor-Patient Interactions and Healthcare System Biases	208
7.3 Policy Recommendations	210
7.3.1 Health Interventions to Mitigate GBV Perpetration and Exposure	210
7.3.2. Value-Based Payment Models for Gender-Equitable Care	212

7.3.3. Expand Access to Women's Health Services Through Telehealth and Mobile Health Technologies	214
7.3.4 Comprehensive Revision of Medical Curriculum, Enhanced Professional Assessments, and Mandatory Refresher Courses for Practising Professionals to Bridge Knowledge Gaps	216
7.3.5 Mandate Gender-Disaggregated Data Collection	218
7.3.6 Research for Non-Hormonal Contraception	218
CAREER	222
8.1 The Situation	222
8.1.1 Educational Attainment & Earnings Disparity	222
8.1.2 Gender Segregation in Caring Professions and STEM Fields	222
8.1.3 Reliance on Part-time Employment	223
8.1.4 Impact of Care-taking Responsibilities; Constrained "Choices"	224
8.1.5 Prevalence of Workplace Harassment & Limited Redress	224
8.1.6 Structural Impediments to Career Advancement	225
8.2 Primary Research	225
8.2.1 Survey Findings	226
8.2.2 Interview Insights	227
8.2.2.1 Theme 1: Career Challenges for Young Australian Women	227
8.2.2.2 Theme 2: Support Systems and Mentorship	229
8.2.2.3 Theme 3: Education and Early Career Programs	231
8.2.2.4 Theme 4: Workplace Discrimination and Sexism	232
8.2.2.5 Theme 5: Job Stability and Financial Stress	234
8.2.2.6 Theme 6: Gender Bias in Professional Settings	236
8.2.3 Literature Review	237
8.3 Policy Recommendations	238
8.3.1 Development of an Australian Economic Opportunities Platform (EOP) for Young Women	238
8.3.2 Child Care Access Initiative	240
8.3.3 Parental Leave Incentives & Return-to-Work Support	241
8.3.4 Augmenting Existing Women in STEM Scholarships	243
8.3.5 Female-Focused Career Enhancement for HR Staff	246
8.3.6 Gender-Sensitive Career Tool	247
8.3.7 Workplace Interventions to Mitigate GBV Perpetration & Exposure	248
FINANCIAL SECURITY	253
9.1 The Situation	253
9.1.1 Self-Assessment & Understanding Core Concepts	253
9.1.2 Financial Attitudes & Behaviours	254

9.1.3 Consequences of Financial Literacy Gaps	254
9.2 Primary Research	255
9.2.1 Survey Findings	256
9.2.1.1 Systemic Inequities in Financial Education	257
9.2.1.2 Specific Systemic Inequities in Financial Education	258
9.2.1.3 Correlation Between Educational Experiences and Financial Education	260
9.2.1.4 Gender Discrimination and Financial Education	260
9.2.1.5 Educational Confidence and Financial Outcomes	260
9.2.1.6 Awareness of Gender Issues and Financial Priorities	261
9.2.1.7 Financial Education and Career Progression	261
9.2.2 Interview Insights	261
9.3 Policy Recommendations	261
9.3.1 Financial Education in the Australian Curriculum	262
9.3.2 Universal Basic Income (UBI) for Victim-Survivors of DFSV	263
9.3.3 Trust Fund for Low-Income Children	265
9.3.4. Employer Investment in Women's Training and Development	268
POLITICAL AGENCY	272
10.1 The Situation	272
10.1.1 Political Exclusion and Disillusionment	272
10.1.2 Political Engagement	273
10.1.3 Barriers to Political Careers	273
10.1.4 Calls for Change	274
10.2 Primary Research	274
10.2.1 Survey Findings	274
10.2 Interview Insights	277
10.2.1 Theme 1: Political Representation and Engagement	277
10.2.2 Theme 2: Government Responsiveness and Policy Preferences	279
10.2.3 Theme 3: Impact of Political Climate on Women	281
10.3 Policy Recommendations	283
10.3.1 National Young Women's Agenda	283
10.3.2 Mechanism for Young Women to Hear About the Impact of Government Policies and Programs on Women's Lives	284
10.3.3 Ecosystem Map of the Australian Gender Justice Sector	287
10.3.4 Youth Engagement Platform for Policy Feedback	288
SUMMARY SOLUTIONS	291
FUTURE OF GENDER JUSTICE	299

11.1 The Illusion of Progress	300
11.2 Systemic Challenges	300
11.3 Backlash	302
11.4 Contemporary Feminist Challenges	303
11.5 Recalibrating Feminist Activism	304
11.6 Conclusion	306
NEXT STEPS FOR GOVERNMENT	307
CONCLUSION	311

INTRODUCTION

Young Women’s Alliance (YWA) is an ACNC-registered charity aiming to improve young women’s life outcomes through data and consultation-driven policies and programs. We focus on the critical but tumultuous decade of 18-28. During this decade, women face heightened risks of gender discrimination, sexual assault, political marginalisation, economic insecurity, and life-ending violence, yet lack the social, political, and financial capital to counter these challenges.

YWA has completed a 2-year research project which included a listening tour, gender survey, long-form interviews, expert consultations, engagement with men’s behavioural change practitioners, and literature reviews. The research project has been guided by distinguished academics at eight Australian universities - Australian National University (ANU), University of New South Wales (UNSW), Griffith University, University of Queensland (UQ), University of Sydney (USyd), Monash University, University of Western Australia (UWA), and the University of Melbourne, as well as 3 overseas universities - Stanford University, University of Oxford, and University of Cambridge. It has culminated in two reports: ‘**Young Minds, Old Biases: The Gender-Based Violence Crisis**’¹ which focuses exclusively on gender-based violence (GBV) and was released on 14 August 2024 at NSW Parliament, and this publication, the ‘**Young Women’s Policy Submission**’ a compelling picture of young Australian women’s lives across ten core areas, including GBV.

The Young Women's Policy Submission (YWPS) is a timely report addressing the urgent need for evidence-based and consultation-informed solutions to the persistent gender inequalities and alarming well-being trends among young Australian women (ages 18-28), who make up 7% of the Australian population.² YWPS offers a comprehensive, coordinated agenda for improving young women's lives across society, family, education, gender-based violence, self-esteem, health, career, financial security, political agency, and policy preferences. By exploring the intersections of gender with these aspects of life, the report provides a holistic understanding of the complex factors influencing young Australian women's experiences and outcomes, and necessary policy interventions.

The evidence for action is clear: gender injustice is a global issue. Women experience disadvantages across all life areas, young women even more so. In Australia over 50% of women in their 20s have experienced sexual violence,³ 75% of young women report gender-based online bullying, harassment, and abuse, and 45% have self-harmed. The mental health impact is severe, with nearly half of women aged 18-30 experiencing psychological distress and one in five diagnosed with anxiety and depression—almost double the rate of their male counterparts.⁴

¹ Young Women’s Alliance. *Young Minds, Old Biases: The Gender-Based Violence Crisis*. 2024. <https://www.youngwomensallianceaus.com/reports>

² Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *Population: Census*. ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/population-census/latest-release>.

³ ABC News. 2022. “Women Experience Sexual Violence at Greater Rates than Previously Thought, New Australian Report Finds - ABC News,” August 30, 2022. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-08-31/women-experiencing-higher-rates-of-sexual-violence-than-thought/101388410>.

⁴ “» the Global Loss of the U-Shaped Curve of Happiness.” 2024. Interdependence.org. 2024. <https://www.interdependence.org/blog/the-global-loss-of-the-u-shaped-curve-of-happiness/>.

These issues are exacerbated by systemic workforce inequalities. Analysis shows that as the proportion of women in an industry increases, pay declines, disproportionately affecting young women.⁵

Additionally, 72% of young women feel excluded from political spaces,⁶ and women disproportionately bear unpaid domestic labour and childcare responsibilities.⁷ Single mothers face even greater barriers and financial penalties.⁸ Women's health concerns are more likely to be dismissed, with inadequate research on medical procedures and inconsistent access to reproductive healthcare. Women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those with disabilities, and those with low incomes face compounded health disparities.⁹

GBV in Australia has also surged, with 30% more women being killed by a current or former partner in 2024, than the same time last year.¹⁰ As of 29th July 2024, 48 women have been killed as a result of GBV.¹¹ A youth focus is crucial as a significant number of the recent, alleged perpetrators have been under the age of 30.¹² Additionally, 50% of young women experience personal distress related to sexual issues.¹³ Attitudinal and behavioural studies also suggest that the narrative of linear progress — that younger generations are becoming more progressive in belief and behaviour — is incorrect. Some young

⁵ KPMG. "She's Price(D)Less." 2022. <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/au/pdf/2022/kpmg-shes-priced-less-2022.pdf>.

⁶ 'Double Disillusion': New Global Survey Finds Australia Lags the World When It Comes to Girls and Young Women's Trust and Participation in Politics - Plan International Australia." 2022. Plan International Australia. <https://www.plan.org.au/media-centre/new-global-survey-finds-australia-lags-the-world-when-it-comes-to-girls-trust-and-participation-in-politics/>.

⁷ "Women Continue to Do More Unpaid Domestic Work than Men, Better Provision of External Support Services and Greater Flexibility to Work from Home Needed to Reduce Burden - Roy Morgan Research." 2024. Roymorgan.com. 2024. <https://www.roymorgan.com/findings/women-continue-to-do-more-unpaid-domestic-work-than-men-better-provision-of-external-support-services-and-greater-flexibility-to-work-from-home-needed-to-reduce-burden>.

⁸ Davidson, P; Bradbury, B; and Wong, M (2023), Poverty in Australia 2023: Who is affected Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report no. 20. Australian Council of Social Service and UNSW Sydney.

⁹ People With Disability Australia, National Ethnic Disability Alliance, & Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia. 2021. The experiences and perspectives of people with disability from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds: Joint submission to the Disability Royal Commission by PWDA, NEDA, and FECCA. People With Disability Australia. <https://pwd.org.au/the-experiences-and-perspectives-of-people-with-disability-from-culturally-and-linguistically-diverse-backgrounds-joint-submission-to-the-disability-royal-commission-by-pwda-neda-and-fecca/>

¹⁰ Knaus, C. (2024, April 29). 30% spike in rate of Australian women killed by intimate partner last year, data shows. The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/apr/29/30-spike-in-rate-of-australian-women-killed-by-intimate-partner-last-year-data-shows>

¹¹ "The number of women who die in gendered violence is collated and published by Destroy the Joint's Counting Dead Women and Femicide Watch's Red Heart Campaign for figures on the number of women killed across the nation." (ABC News, *Eleven more women have died violently in 2024 compared to the same time last year*, April 2024).

¹² Violent porn, online misogyny driving gendered violence, say experts. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/violent-porn-online-misogyny-driving-gendered-violence-say-experts-20240426-p5fmx9.html>

¹³ "Most Young Women Unhappy, Stressed about Their Sex Lives: Study." 2020. Monash University. February 25, 2020. <https://www.monash.edu/news/articles/most-young-women-unhappy,-stressed-about-their-sex-lives-study>.

men hold more conservative or similarly conservative views about gender roles than their older counterparts, and perpetrate high levels of violence.^{14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21}

In March 2024, the Australian Government released Australia's first national strategy to achieve gender equality: 'Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality'. This is a commendable step forward. To facilitate understanding of the lived experience of young women, a critical and sizeable demographic, and address gaps in Australia's gender research, YWA's research has specifically explored key priorities of 'Working for Women,' particularly 'Future Directions.'

Given the well-documented challenges young women face, including mental health issues, economic insecurity, and exposure to GBV, there is a need for targeted policy solutions and investments. This is critical as government policy drives gender equality; significant strides have been made in various countries through targeted interventions.²² In Singapore, policies promoting work-life balance, such as paid maternity leave, tax relief, and child care subsidies, helped double women's labour force participation from 28% in 1970 to 58% in 2016.²³ Additionally, Japan's labour ministry program which promoted the role of men in child care, contributed to an increase in female labour force participation from less than 14% to 40%.²⁴ In Canada, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's appointment of the country's first gender-balanced cabinet in 2015 spurred progress toward gender parity, with gender equality becoming the most actively pursued Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) in 2017.²⁵

The YWA team is eager to assist further with policy, intervention, and programs, leveraging our network, research, and expertise. Specifically, YWA seeks to contribute to the implementation of Australian state and federal plans and strategies — Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality, the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022 - 2032, the Action Plan addressing GBV in higher education, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission Strategic Plan 2023-26, NSW Women's Strategy 2023-2026, Victoria's gender equality strategy and action plan 2023-2027, WA's Plan for Gender Equality, Queensland's Women's Strategy 2022-27, NT Gender Equality Action Plan 2022-

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Intimate partner violence among Australian 18-19 year olds. *Australian Institute of Family Studies*. <https://aifs.gov.au/research/commissioned-reports/intimate-partner-violence-among-australian-18-19-year-olds>

¹⁶ Media Release: NCAS Young Australians. *ANROWS*. <https://www.anrows.org.au/media-releases/media-release-ncas-young-australians/>

¹⁷ Sexual strangulation can mean minutes to death, yet half of young people do it. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/sexual-strangulation-can-mean-minutes-to-death-yet-half-of-young-people-do-it-20240620-p5jini9.html>

¹⁸ Sexual violence 'disturbingly common' as research shows one in five admit to it. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/sexual-violence-disturbingly-common-as-research-shows-one-in-five-admit-to-it-20240709-p5js7y.html>

¹⁹ Young Australians confused about consent and control in the age of Tinder and Snapchat. *ANROWS*. <https://www.anrows.org.au/media-releases/young-australians-confused-about-consent-and-control-in-the-age-of-tinder-and-snapchat/>

²⁰ Prevalence of sexual violence perpetration in Australia. *ABC News*. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-07-09/prevalence-of-sexual-violence-perpetration-in-australia/104076618>

²¹ Wescott, S., Roberts, S., & Zhao, X. (2023). The problem of anti-feminist 'manfluencer' Andrew Tate in Australian schools: Women teachers' experiences of resurgent male supremacy. *Journal of Gender Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2023.2292622>

²² Gupta, Vasudha, Solveigh Hieronimus, Mekala Krishnan, and Anu Madgavkar. "Accelerating Gender Parity: What Can Governments Do?" *McKinsey & Company*, 28 January 2019, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-sector/our-insights/accelerating-gender-parity-what-can-governments-do>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

2025, South Australia's Women's Equality Blueprint 2023–2026, ACT Women's Plan 2023-26, among others.

Please note that this report refers to experiences mostly experienced by cisgender men and women, and their experiences in heterosexual relationships.

HOW TO READ YWPS

This document is an in-depth analysis of the situation for young women in Australia across different life areas. This guide is designed to support navigation of this document and enhance readability of its structure and contents.

The document is organised into several key sections, categorised by ten life areas. Each section includes:

1. The Situation

This section outlines the current state of affairs regarding young people, focusing on women. It is designed to provide an overview of existing conditions, trends, and challenges, answering the question: *What does existing research say about young people's, particularly young women's experiences?*

Secondary Research: Summarises information gathered from existing sources, such as academic articles, reports, and databases, providing a foundational understanding of the current landscape.

Rationale for Research: Demonstrating the significance of the study, with reference to gaps in existing knowledge, and the potential benefits of addressing the identified research questions.

2. Primary Research

This section details the original research conducted by YWA, including surveys, literature reviews, and interviews. This primary research is presented and analysed within the context of the identified knowledge gaps and supports identification of new insights and data specific to the study. It seeks to answer the question: *What does YWA research, including our survey, interviews, literature reviews, and expert consultations, say about young people's, particularly young women's experience?*

Summary of Problems: In-depth analysis of the problems identified through the research. It outlines these issues in detail, supported by both secondary and primary research data.

3. Policy Recommendations

Finally, this section provides actionable recommendations for policymakers and/or other relevant stakeholders based on the YWA's original research findings. These recommendations are designed to guide decision-making and aim to enhance the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming initiatives, ensuring they are more resilient, inclusive, and impactful in promoting gender equality.

Solutions: Proposes solutions to address the identified problems. These solutions are derived from the research findings and are aimed at resolving the issues discussed.

Note on Research Methods

While the document incorporates various research methods, not all of them are explicitly mentioned above. The research encompasses a range of methodologies, including but not limited to, secondary research, surveys, literature reviews, and in-depth interviews – these are outlined in the methodology on page 17. In combination, these methods enhance data triangulation and contribute to robust findings and recommendations presented in the document, providing a comprehensive analysis of the research topic.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

KEY TERMS: GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Domestic violence (DV): Domestic violence is a broader term that includes IPV but also extends to violence among family members or others living in the same household. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, emotional abuse, and psychological abuse aimed at asserting control or domination over another individual, whether they are a partner, child, or elder; and involves a range of violent behaviours between current or former intimate partners, where one partner seeks to dominate and control the other.

Gender-based violence (GBV): Gender-based violence (GBV) encompasses harmful actions aimed at individuals or groups due to their gender. This violence arises from entrenched gender inequality, power imbalances, and harmful societal norms. GBV includes various forms of abuse such as physical, sexual, psychological, and economic. While women and girls are disproportionately affected, men, boys, and LGBTQIA+ individuals can also be victims.

Intimate partner violence (IPV): Intimate partner violence (IPV) encompasses any behaviour within a current or former intimate relationship that results in physical, sexual, or psychological harm. IPV is a subset of GBV that specifically involves violence or abuse between current or former intimate partners.

These terms are often used interchangeably because they describe related phenomena that frequently occur together and share underlying causes; the overlap is particularly evident in the following ways:

- **Intersectionality:** Intersectionality highlights how different forms of discrimination and identity factors (such as race, class, sexual orientation) intersect, affecting individuals' experiences of violence. This framework helps in understanding how GBV, IPV, and DV can be compounded by other social inequalities, making them interrelated in practice and impact.^{26 27}
- **Policy and Advocacy:** In efforts to address these issues, policies and advocacy often group these forms of violence together to ensure comprehensive strategies that address the root causes and provide support to all affected individuals, regardless of the specific type of violence they experience.^{28 29}
- **Shared Dynamics:** All three terms involve dynamics of power and control, often manifesting in similar forms of abuse, such as physical, emotional, or sexual violence. This commonality makes it practical to discuss them together in many contexts.^{30 31}

²⁶ García-Moreno, Claudia, et al. "Understanding and Addressing Violence Against Women: Intimate Partner Violence." *World Health Organization*, 2015. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4916258/>

²⁷ Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victoria State Government. *Victorian Family Violence Data Collection Framework: Intersectionality and Family Violence*. Victorian Government, 2020. <https://www.vic.gov.au/victorian-family-violence-data-collection-framework/intersectionality-and-family-violence>

²⁸ NSW Government. *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022-2027*. Department of Communities and Justice, 2022. <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/documents/service-providers/domestic-and-family-violence-services/NSW-Domestic-and-Family-Violence-Plan-2022-2027.pdf>

²⁹ Our Watch. *Guidelines for Reporting on Violence Against Women and Their Children*. Our Watch, 2021. <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/media-and-reporting/resources/guidelines-for-reporting>

³⁰ USA for UNFPA. *What is Gender-Based Violence (GBV)?* UNFPA, 2021. <https://www.usaforunfpa.org/what-is-gender-based-violence-gbv/>

³¹ United Nations Population Fund Asia-Pacific Regional Office. *kNOwVAWdata Key Terminology*. UNFPA, 2021. <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/kNOwVAWdata%20Key%20Terminology.pdf>

In this report, all terms are used, at times distinctly and other times interchangeably, as appropriate.

Emotional abuse³² includes behaviours that can severely impact a person's mental health and emotional well-being. These behaviours include:

- Verbal Abuse: This involves yelling, insulting, or swearing at the victim.
- Gaslighting: Manipulating someone to doubt their own perceptions, feelings, or sanity.
- Isolation: Restricting the victim's freedom, limiting their contact with others, or controlling their movements.
- Financial Abuse: Controlling or taking the victim's money or belongings, preventing them from working or studying.
- Social Abuse: Damaging the victim's relationships or reputation, monitoring their activities.
- Threats and Intimidation: Making the victim feel afraid or threatened, including threats to harm themselves or others

Financial abuse³³ can include restricting access to money, controlling household spending, preventing the victim from working, or using their financial resources without consent. These actions can lead to feelings of entrapment and dependency, which are common outcomes of emotional abuse as well.

Sexual violence³⁴ encompasses the occurrence, attempt, or threat of non-consensual sexual acts experienced by individuals aged 15 and older. It is measured by combining experiences of sexual assault and sexual threat.

- **Sexual assault:** Any non-consensual act of a sexual nature carried out against a person through physical force, intimidation, or coercion. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - Rape and attempted rape
 - Aggravated sexual assault (involving a weapon)
 - Indecent assault
 - Penetration by objects
 - Forced sexual activity without penetration
 - Attempts to force a person into sexual activity
- **Sexual threat:** Face-to-face threats of sexual acts that the targeted person believes are both feasible and likely to be carried out.

Physical violence³⁵ encompasses the occurrence, attempt, or threat of physical assault experienced by individuals aged 15 and older. It is measured by combining experiences of physical assault and physical threat.

³² ReachOut Australia. *What is Emotional Abuse?* ReachOut, 2023. <https://au.reachout.com/challenges-and-coping/abuse-and-violence/what-is-emotional-abuse>

³³ MoneySmart. *Financial Abuse*. Australian Securities and Investments Commission, 2023. <https://moneysmart.gov.au/living-in-retirement/financial-abuse>

³⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Sexual Violence, 2021-22*. ABS, 2022. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/sexual-violence/2021-22>

³⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Physical Violence, Latest Release*. ABS, 2023. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/physical-violence/latest-release#definition-of-physical-violence>

- **Physical assault:** Any incident involving the use of physical force with the intent to harm or frighten a person. This includes assaults that occur during robberies, in the line of work (e.g., while working as a security guard), at school, or overseas. Physical assault includes, but is not limited to:
 - Pushing, grabbing, or shoving
 - Slapping
 - Kicking, biting, or hitting with a fist
 - Hitting with an object capable of causing harm
 - Beating
 - Choking
 - Stabbing with a knife
 - Shooting with a gun
 - Any other type of physical assault
- **Physical threat:** Any face-to-face verbal and/or physical expression of intent (or suggestion of intent) to inflict physical harm, which the targeted person believes is both feasible and likely to be carried out. Physical threats include:
 - Threatening or attempting to hit with a fist or any potentially harmful object
 - Threatening or attempting to stab with a knife
 - Threatening or attempting to shoot with a gun
 - Threatening or attempting to physically harm in any other way

OTHER KEY TERMS

Gender mainstreaming: Gender mainstreaming involves integrating gender perspectives in the preparation, design, implementation, evaluation of policies, regulatory measures, and spending programs to combat discrimination and promote gender equality.³⁶

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AOD: Alcohol and Other Drugs

ASI: Ambivalent Sexism Inventory

ATO: Australian Taxation Office

CSR: Corporate Social Responsibility

CRRE: Consent and Respectful Relationships Education

DFSV: Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence

³⁶ European Institute for Gender Equality, *What is gender mainstreaming?* Available at: https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/what-is-gender-mainstreaming?language_content_entity=en.

HELP: Higher Education Loan Program

L&D: Learning and Development

MBCP: Men's Behaviour Change Program

NGOs: Non-Government Organisation

PCOS: Polycystic Ovary Syndrome

PPR: Paid Parental Leave

R&D: Research and Development

SEIFA: Socioeconomic Index for Areas

SES: Socioeconomic Status

STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics

STIs: Sexually Transmitted Infection

UBI: Universal Basic Income

VAW: Violence Against Women

WPI: Wage Price Index



METHODOLOGY

This report is informed by research from YWA’s primary and secondary methods. All primary research methods involved young Australians (ages 18-28) currently resident in Australia.

The national listening tour featured online and in-person events and was attended by 12,000 young people. The speakers included high-profile Australian women in media, politics, and academia: Annabel Crabb, Chanel Contos, Dr. Jenna Price, Jessie Stephens, and Lilian Ahenkan. Data collection on personal views and political opinions was completed through event-based surveys.

The national gender survey recorded 3,000 responses. It was a nationally representative sample with a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents. While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons make up 3% of the Australian population, they made up 8.7% of survey respondents. It was administered in two rounds through Qualtrics, and responses were collected through cluster and stratified sampling from a market research panel. Postcodes and demographic data were collected to support a comparative analysis of specific population segments. The questionnaire was structured by ten core life areas - education, career, self-esteem, health, sex, relationships, family/friends, Australian society, political agency, and policy - and included both close-ended and long-form response options. Long-form responses were specifically utilised to collect data on effective interventions for primary prevention and early intervention on GBV.

Qualitative data was collected through 60-minute long-form interviews with 300 young people across all Australian states and territories. Participants were sought through outreach to youth and gender groups, schools, universities, TAFEs, and word-of-mouth. A self-interview method was used, where participants were provided a structured interview guide including instructions for completion, questions to respond to, and a sample timeline for submission. Participants were able to utilise both audio and visual formats to complete the interview. This design encouraged honesty and candour across topic areas. This aimed to increase the accessibility of the interview process and allow participants to navigate complex and personal topics more comfortably. Interview participants completed a demographics form prior to the interview, and their responses enabled filtering to disadvantage-specific questions. The interviews focused on educational experiences, life challenges, mental and physical health, GBV, gender norm formation, effective models of consultation, and policy and systems change. After the interviews, young women were asked to complete an exercise wherein they listed their gendered experiences, inspired by Laura Bates' 'Everyday Sexism' project. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Male participants received an incentive of \$60 on completion of the interview. Female participants received an incentive of \$60-100 (dependent on the extensiveness of their list exercise) on completion of the interview.

The literature review involved theme-specific searches, collection, review, and analysis of 812 academic articles. Articles were focused on publications primarily between 2000 and 2024. The geographic scope mainly included high-income countries such as Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Identified articles were organised by theme and reviewed for the extent to which they addressed the following questions:

GBV and Prevention

1. Why do young men hold poor views about women, and what are interventions or policies to stop these views from developing or turning into harmful actions against women?
2. What is effective in the primary prevention of sexual assault (women)?
3. What is effective in the primary prevention of sexual assault (men)?

4. How does society encourage men to form poor views of women?
5. Is there a link between men holding poor views about women and violent, discriminatory, or oppressive behaviour towards women?
6. What are optimal interventions and intervention points in young women's and men's lives to prevent gender-based discrimination and violence?
7. Why do young women not contact police regarding gendered violence issues? How can this be improved?
8. What are the factors leading to young men engaging in sexual violence?
9. What are the factors that deter young men from engaging in domestic family sexual violence (DFS)?
10. What is a successful model for women to engage with men's behavioural change program practitioners to reduce violence?
11. Have educational programs regarding consent in universities been successful in developed countries? What improvements are needed?
12. Have educational programs regarding consent in schools been successful in developed countries? What improvements are needed?

Gender Equality and Economic Policies

13. What are effective interventions for achieving gender equality?
14. What are effective policies for achieving gender equality?
15. How have gender-equal societies been created?
16. What policies create economic equality for women?
17. What labour market inefficiencies exist in high-income countries like Australia and how can they be addressed?
18. Has gender mainstreaming failed?
19. Why has gender equality not been achieved despite policy and investment?
20. Can a strong economy and socialist policies work together?
21. Does it make business sense to provide Universal Basic Income (UBI) to women experiencing violence in developed countries?
22. What are the most impactful policy solutions preferred by young people to address gender inequality?
23. What policy solutions to address gender inequality are preferred by young adults?
24. What are the most effective strategies in de-segregating industries by gender?

Wellbeing and Support Systems

24. What is affecting young men's wellbeing, and how can their wellbeing be supported?
25. What is affecting young women's wellbeing, and how can their wellbeing be supported?
26. What makes the period of 18-28 rife with gender-based discrimination and violence for women in Australia or in English-speaking developed countries (OECD/Developed Countries)?
27. What are the strengths of the government support systems/services for young women in Australia?
28. What are the weaknesses of the government support systems/services for young women in Australia? How can these be improved? Is it done better in other OECD countries?

29. How can we achieve relationship equality for women?

Education and Career Outcomes

30. How do government policies in OECD countries support gender equality in education?

31. What are the most effective government policies for improving career outcomes for young women?

Housing and Health Policies

32. What are the most effective strategies to increase crisis and transitional housing options for women and children escaping DFV and older women at risk of homelessness, especially in OECD/Western economies?

33. What are the most effective government policies for improving health outcomes for young women in OECD/Western economies?

Monitoring and Evaluation of Gender Policies

34. What are the gaps in current monitoring and evaluation of gender policies in Australia? What are the gaps in current monitoring and evaluation of gender policies in OECD countries?

35. What evaluation methods or structures have been effective in monitoring, evaluating, and optimising government policies on gender equity in Australia?

Family and Educational Influences

36. How do early family and educational experiences influence financial independence, career success, and overall life outcomes for women in Australia?

37. How does gender affect various life areas to create a cycle of disadvantage for young women?

Engagement and Policy Development

38. What are highly effective models for engaging young women to develop and implement government policies?

39. Has the increasing focus on ‘consultation’ and ‘participatory research’ by state and federal governments improved policy outcomes in Australia?

40. What economic models and methods of value measurement support more provision of public goods by the government? How can a strong welfare state and a strong economy co-exist?

*Further information about methodology, including sample numbers and proportions and weighted numbers and proportions by demographic, is available in a separate Methodology Report.



THEORY OF CHANGE

Problem Statement

Young Australian women face pervasive and interconnected challenges across various aspects of life, including education, career, health, relationships, and political agency.

These challenges arise from systemic gender injustice, discrimination, and harmful societal norms, which limit young women's opportunities and well-being. Despite growing recognition of these issues, evidence-based solutions and investments remain insufficient, perpetuating the cycle of disadvantage.

YWA's approach to this problem is informed by anthropology, sociology, psychology, and philosophy - aiming to leverage multiple levers for redress.

Anthropological Perspective

These challenges can be understood through cultural anthropology, which examines how societal norms and values shape individuals' experiences and opportunities. The concept of 'doing gender'³⁷ highlights how gender is not merely a biological fact but a social construct that is actively performed and reinforced through everyday interactions and institutions. YWA recognises that addressing young women's issues requires changing the ingrained cultural beliefs that perpetuate gender inequality.

Sociological Perspective

YWA is informed by intersectionality theory³⁸ which posits that social stratification, such as gender, race, class, and sexuality, intersect to create unique experiences of oppression and privilege. This perspective emphasises the importance of considering the diverse identities of young women when developing policies and interventions. Additionally, the concept of social reproduction³⁹ notes how educational institutions and other social structures can reproduce gender injustice across generations, underscoring the need for systemic change.

Psychological Perspective

YWA draws on social cognitive theory,⁴⁰ which emphasises the reciprocal relationship between individuals, their behaviour, and their environment. This theory suggests that young women's attitudes and aspirations are shaped by their experiences and the social models they encounter. By providing positive role models, challenging stereotypes, and creating supportive environments, YWA aims to foster young women's self-efficacy in pursuing their goals. Moreover, the concept of stereotype threat⁴¹ highlights how negative stereotypes about women's abilities can undermine their performance, necessitating identity-safe spaces for young women.

Philosophical Perspective

YWA is grounded in the principles of social justice and gender justice, drawing on the work of feminist philosophers such as Simone de Beauvoir and Iris Manion Young. De Beauvoir's concept of women as the 'Other'⁴² highlights how women have been historically defined in relation to men, rather than as

³⁷ West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender & Society*, 1(2), 125-151. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243287001002002>

³⁸ Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139-167.

³⁹ Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.-C. (1990). *Reproduction in education, society and culture* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

⁴⁰ Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Prentice-Hall.

⁴¹ Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69(5), 797-811. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.69.5.797>

⁴² de Beauvoir, S. (2011). *The second sex* (C. Borde & S. Malovany-Chevallier, Trans.). Vintage Books. (Original work published 1949)

autonomous subjects. Young's notion of 'gender as seriality'⁴³ emphasises the collective yet individualised experiences of women within patriarchal structures, acknowledging both shared and unique aspects of women's oppression. These philosophical perspectives underscore YWA's commitment to dismantling systemic barriers which limit young women's freedoms and opportunities, and to including the experiences of marginalised women in the policy-making process. Furthermore, Judith Butler's exploration of gender performativity⁴⁴ challenges the fixed categories of gender, advocating for a more fluid and inclusive understanding of identity. This holistic approach ensures that YWA addresses the complexities of gendered experiences.

To actualise this Theory of Change, practical inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts include:

Inputs

- Comprehensive data and research on the multi-faceted challenges faced by young women, as outlined in the young women's life map.
- Expertise and insights from young women, policymakers, academics, and practitioners across various sectors.
- Best practices and evidence from successful gender justice initiatives and policies worldwide.
- Financial and human resources to support the development and implementation of the YWPS.

Activities

- Engage young women, experts, and stakeholders to co-design targeted, evidence-based policy solutions addressing key challenges identified in the life map.
- Conduct rigorous research and analysis to inform policy development and ensure feasibility and effectiveness.
- Develop a comprehensive policy framework outlining specific interventions, programs, and reforms across life areas.
- Build partnerships and collaborations with government agencies, civil society organisations, and private sector actors to support policy implementation and maximise impact.
- Launch public awareness and education campaigns to build support for YWA and counter the backlash against feminism and gender equality efforts.

Outputs

- A set of evidence-based, youth-informed policy recommendations and interventions targeting key challenges faced by young women.
- Strong partnerships and collaborations with stakeholders to drive policy implementation and change.
- Increased public awareness and support for addressing young women's issues and advancing gender justice.
- Enhanced capacity and resources for organisations and institutions working to support young women and promote gender justice.

⁴³ Young, I. M. (1994). Gender as seriality: Thinking about women as a social collective. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 19(3), 713-738. <https://doi.org/10.1086/494918>

⁴⁴ Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.

Short-term Outcomes

- Increased recognition of the specific challenges and needs of young women among policymakers, service providers, and the general public.
- Greater investment in programs and initiatives supporting young women's education, employment, health, safety, and political participation.
- Improved access to resources, support, and opportunities for young women, particularly those from marginalised or disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Strengthened networks and collaboration among organisations and individuals working to advance young women's rights and well-being.

Intermediate Outcomes

- Reduced gender gaps in educational attainment, employment, pay, and leadership positions.
- Improved health outcomes and access to gender-responsive healthcare for young women.
- Decreased rates of gender-based violence, harassment, and discrimination against young women.
- Increased political participation and representation of young women in decision-making processes.
- Positive shifts in societal attitudes and norms regarding gender roles and women's rights.

Long-term Impact

A society where young women can thrive and reach their full potential, free from gender-based discrimination, violence, and inequality. This impact is characterised by:

- Equal access to education, employment, and leadership opportunities for young women,
- Elimination of occupational segregation and gendered poverty,
- Universal access to comprehensive, youth-friendly health services, including sexual and reproductive health,
- Eradication of gender-based violence and harassment,
- Equal representation and influence of young women in political and decision-making processes,
- Positive, equitable gender norms and attitudes that value and support young women's rights and contributions to society.

Assumptions

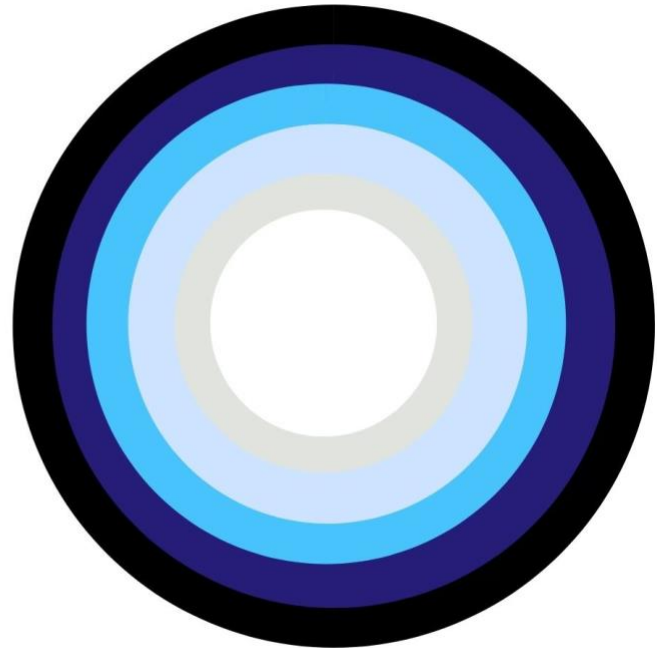
- Policymakers and key stakeholders will be receptive to the evidence-based recommendations put forth by YWA.
- Sufficient resources and political will can be mobilised to support the implementation of the proposed policies and interventions.
- Collaborative efforts among government, civil society, and private sector actors can effectively drive systemic change.
- Addressing the root causes of gender injustice and discrimination will lead to improved outcomes and opportunities for young women.

External Factors

- Political and economic stability in Australia.
- Competing policy priorities and resource allocation decisions.

- Resistance or backlash from groups or individuals opposed to gender equality and women's rights.
- Broader societal and cultural shifts affecting attitudes and norms related to gender and equality.

Theory of Change: Summary Model





LIFE MAPS

Maps detailing the gendered challenges and dynamics in the lives of young women and men across various areas—education, career, financial education, society, relationships/sex, friends/family, health, and political agency—were developed based on survey and interview data. These maps were refined through two rounds of feedback, where young participants reviewed and critiqued them to ensure accuracy. The primary research was then compared with existing studies to validate the findings and strengthen the conclusions. The goal of these maps is to facilitate deeper understanding of how gender intersects with young people’s lives, develop more targeted interventions, and reduce gender-based disadvantages. First, the young Australian women map is displayed; next, the young Australian men map.

YOUNG WOMEN MAP

young Australian women
a whole-of-life picture

Flag = point of intervention

Star = accumulated disadvantage

Education

- Lower confidence and ambition in high school
- Barriers to accessing and completing higher education
- Gender dynamics in classroom settings influence participation, confidence, and pursuit of certain disciplines (e.g. A study found that by the age of 14, most Australian students have decided whether to follow a STEM-related career pathway)
- Feeling comfortable speaking up in class and having materials that reflect women's perspectives in high school are associated with higher ambition and confidence in making significant professional contributions
- Negative educational experiences due to gender discrimination correlate strongly with poor access to financial education and credit; Positive educational experiences correlate with better financial literacy, confidence in financial decision-making, and ease in finding well-paying jobs.
- Disparities in access to research funding, scholarships and post-doctoral positions
- Negative educational experiences correlate with being limited in achieving professional goals and experiencing workplace sexual harassment; A good understanding of gender discrimination and women's rights correlates with being ambitious and believing in one's ability to contribute professionally.
- Sexual assault and harassment affect participation and success in higher education environments
- Courses and materials that perpetuate gender roles and fail to include women's contributions to fields
- Impact of attending single-sex vs. co-educational schools on gender attitudes, dynamics, and interactions
- Influence of school environment on preparedness for male-dominated settings

Career

- Employment in lower-paid and lower-status jobs, regardless of experience and qualifications
- Discrimination undermines confidence and career aspirations
- Limited networking opportunities and ineffective "empowerment" programs
- Care duties that lead to early career breaks negatively impact long-term career progression and earnings.
- May feel discouraged from entering into male-dominated fields
- Disparities in access to technology and digital skills training

Financial Education

- Lack of education and engagement with key financial concepts, affecting long-term financial security, salary negotiation, career progression, and superannuation (e.g. Positive financial literacy and budgeting confidence correlate with career ambition and perceived professional competence)
- Challenges in managing credit, HELP loans, and understanding financial products and services
- Gender pay gap affects financial independence and the ability to make life choices free from economic constraints
- Exacerbated by cost-of-living crises and disparity between wage growth and productivity growth, as well as wage growth and house price increases
- Familial and workplace biases wherein parents and employers are more likely to talk about finances with boys and men than girls and women

Society

- Intersectionality (race, sexuality, disability, socioeconomic status)
- Rural and regional areas face greater systemic inequalities in education, health, financial education, career and sex education
- Impacts of unrealistic beauty standards on self-esteem and mental health
- Sexualisation of young children
- Identity becomes entwined with physical characteristics
- Child sexual abuse and grooming
- Cultural and religious norms restricting women's choices and freedoms

Relationships/Sex

- Risks of online dating, including safety concerns and the impact on self-esteem
- Porn normalises aggression in sex, creating an expectation for women to enjoy or be seen as 'boring' and 'vanilla'
- Education policies fail to address the impact of modern porn culture extracting BDSM (Bondage, Discipline, Domination, Submission, Sadism) culture from porn without the conversations and hard boundaries necessary to ensure safe and consensual activities
- Comprehensive sex and consent education is correlated to emotional and intellectual fulfillment in relationships and comfort discussing gender issues
- Disproportionate burden of emotional, household, and caretaking labour
- Coercive control and domestic violence
- Female intelligence, success, and ambition may lead to feelings of emasculation
- Challenges in accessing confidential and non-judgmental sexual health services
- Discriminatory experiences when navigating sexual identity and LGBTQIA+ experiences
- Fetishisation of LGBTQIA+ expression complicates navigation of sexuality

Friends/Family

- Tension between cultural/family expectations and individual aspirations, particularly in multicultural and immigrant communities
- Influence of parents' relationships on interpersonal relationships
- Witnessing or experiencing DFSV increases likelihood of future DFSV perpetration and victimisation
- Parental attitudes towards education and career shape ambition. Positive family relationships where parents have a gender-equal relationship are consistently linked to better educational experiences whereas sexist family environments correlate with negative educational impacts
- Sexism and misogyny perpetrated by friends and family
- Differential treatment in areas as diverse as financial access and economic opportunities to love and support of family and friends.

Health

- Control over reproductive health decisions by partners or family members
- Women receive inferior healthcare. There is less research into women-specific issues contributing to misdiagnosis (e.g. Heart disease often categorised as gastrointestinal problems or anxiety; Endometriosis takes an average of 5 years to receive a diagnosis after seeing a doctor)
- Persistence of 'hysteria' stigma in women's health issues
- Mental health issues, including higher rates of anxiety and depression, and overall lower well-being
- Stigma and lack of services specific to young women's mental health needs, particularly the gendered dimensions of poor mental health (e.g. sexual assault, gender discrimination, violence, misogyny)
- Period poverty

Political Agency

- Limited opportunities to engage in political discussions, movements, and leadership roles, or connect with decision-makers
- Lack of female representation in decision-making positions within governments, corporations, and institutions, or representation at lower levels reducing the propensity for women's perspectives to be considered or implemented
- Advocacy being largely unpaid and reliant on volunteering and good-will
- Unsustainable models for social impact organisations and lack of early stage support especially for youth-led initiatives
- Limited social and economic capital necessary to affect change or influence society

YOUNG MEN MAP

young Australian men
a whole-of-life picture

Flag = point of intervention

Star = accumulated disadvantage/advantage

Education

- Formation of views about girls' intellectual inferiority and boys' intellectual superiority in high school
- Sexist jokes, sexualisation and attractiveness rankings of girls in high school, creating unsafe and uncomfortable learning environments
- Developing a good understanding of gender discrimination and women's rights
 - Star in high school education correlates with financial literacy, confidence in budgeting, and the belief that hard work leads to success
- Solidification of views about which career pathways are available
- Significant mental health challenges in the transition from high school to whatever is next (e.g. vocation, TAFE, university)
- Higher dropout rates among men in higher education; lower higher education attainment

Career

- High societal expectations for early career success and financial stability
- Difficulties finding meaningful work
- Aversion to female-dominated industries
 - Flag Stigma around prioritising family or personal life above work
 - Star Male-dominated industries can perpetuate toxic masculinity which encourages poor behaviour

Financial Education

- Higher propensity for risky financial behaviors particularly in social settings (e.g. gambling during a night out; recklessness is considered a status-earning action)
- Gaps in financial education particularly on high-yield savings accounts, property investment, tax concessions, and voluntary super contributions
- Financial independence, financial literacy, and confidence in financial decisions
 - Star are positively correlated with career ambition and perceived professional contributions

Society

- Increasing role of digital interactions in men's lives, exacerbates isolation and disconnection from community
- 'Shutting off' behaviours due to lack of healthy emotional expression, processing, and regulation skills
 - Flag Normalisation of traditional gender norms and dominance and oppression of women are considered requisite for 'manhood'
 - Flag Limited accountability or consequences for poor behaviour; cultural permissiveness of male recklessness
 - Flag High rates of violence perpetration
- Stigma against expressing vulnerability or seeking help
 - Flag Pressure to adhere to traditional gender roles
- Backlash against feminism (Ipsos' annual International Women's Day survey finds
 - Star 60% of Gen Z men across 31 countries think women's equality discriminates against men; rise of far-right male influencers and polarising online content
- Lack of positive role models outside sport

Relationships/Sex

- Modern relationship dynamics versus traditional expectations
- Expectation in heterosexual relationships that women are 'soft and sweet'
- Not asking for or ensuring consent, assuming consent or entitlement to sexual gratification in long-term relationships
- Perpetrating domestic violence & other forms of relationship abuse
- Rough, dominating, non-consensual sex, mirroring porn; projection of digital behaviours onto real-world partners
- Viewing heterosexual encounters as one-sided or performative rather than mutually connective experiences
- Having less sex overall and less meaningful romantic interactions
- Adoption of BDSM (Bondage, Discipline, Domination, Submission, Sadism) practices without proper understanding of consent and boundaries, or of how sexual dynamics can inadvertently extend to general relationship interactions
- Recognising male victims of domestic violence and challenging norms that discourage them from seeking help
- Flag Navigating societal expectations around sexual activity and performance

Friends/Family

- Tendencies towards isolation as social structures change
 - Flag Sexism and misogyny perpetrated alongside friends and family
- Influence of parents' relationships on future interpersonal relationships and educational outcomes (e.g. A gender-equal relationship between parents strongly correlates with positive educational outcomes such as awareness of educational and job advancement opportunities)
 - Star Observing and/or experiencing DFSV increases likelihood of future DFSV perpetration and victimisation (men who experienced childhood abuse are 3-4 times more likely to perpetrate DFSV as adults)
- Peer groups without women and gender-diverse people creates a self-reinforcing bubble of constrained views and behaviours.
- Peer groups that celebrate and excuse poor behaviour towards women

Health

- Underdiagnosis and undertreatment of mental health issues
- Young men are passing through markers of adulthood from which self-esteem is derived much later than previous generations. This produces feelings of worthlessness and purposelessness. Progressive society also adds a layer of confusion for male self-concept
- Higher rates of substance abuse as coping mechanisms
- Reluctance to seek preventive care and mental health services
- Increasing prevalence of body image disorders and the negative impact of social media on self-esteem
- Normalisation of disordered eating and exercise behaviors within 'gym culture'

Political Agency

- Involvement in discussions on gender issues from a male perspective and a 'collaboration-for-change' perspective, rather than exclusion
- Training men to advocate for gender issues, including those that specifically affect men, in a manner that supports broader goals of equality and inclusivity
- Addressing apathy or disengagement in political processes and society
- Encouraging advocacy on men's issues, including health and fatherhood

ANALYSIS OF EXISTING POLICY LANDSCAPE

1.1 Literature Review

This review analyses the current Australian gender policy landscape at federal and state/territory government levels, particularly their effectiveness in addressing young women’s issues and, more broadly, gender issues. Existing frameworks and policy approaches, at both federal and state/territory levels, were assessed for the extent to which they substantively mainstream gender and model best-practice approaches for effective and participatory policy. Best practice is defined by the OECD, UNDP, UN Women, UNICEF, UNEG and the Australian Government's gender assessment guidelines.

Summary of Current Policy Landscape in Australia

Our review found 13 frameworks and policy approaches currently being implemented in Australia with objectives targeted at achieving gender equality. Six approaches were identified and evaluated at a federal level. At a state/territory level, seven approaches were identified and evaluated. Across both, two additional policy documents were included. At the federal level, the 2023 publication *Including Gender: An APS Guide to Gender Analysis and Gender Impact Assessment*, due to its role in supporting the broader policy ecosystem. The second appeared at a state/territory level – the Tasmanian Women’s Strategy 2018-2021 – that lapsed in 2021.

1.1.1 Federal Frameworks and Policy

Domestic Family Violence and Sexual Violence Commission (DFSVC) Strategic Plan 2023-2026

The DFSVC is Australia’s first focused, actionable plan that outlines specific measures to reduce and ultimately eliminate domestic, family, and sexual violence (DFSVC). The DFSVC Strategic Plan 2023-2026 was created to guide the operations of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission in addressing and ending violence against women and children in Australia. The Plan includes:

- providing strategic advice to the Government
- fostering increased collaboration across sectors to ensure a whole-of-society approach, and
- amplifying existing efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, including the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032.

Focus areas	Systems solutions, safety, family/friends
Date of publication	July 2022
Time frame of implementation/delivery	2023-2026

Attributed stakeholders	Commonwealth Government, Domestic Family Violence and Sexual Violence Commission, Department of Social Services
Investment	\$22.4 million

National Women’s Health Strategy 2020-2030

The National Women’s Health Strategy 2020-2030 aims to improve the health and well-being of women and girls in Australia by addressing priority health needs, identifying key health risks and issues, and tackling health inequities. The Strategy works to strengthen gender equity in research and services, enhance women’s engagement with the healthcare system and demonstrate the significance of gender as a determinant of women's health and well-being.

Focus areas	Health
Date of publication	April 2019
Time frame of implementation/delivery	2020-2030
Attributed stakeholders	Commonwealth Government, Department of Aged Care
Investment	Unknown

National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children (NPEVWC) 2022-2032

The Plan aims to eradicate violence against women and children within one generation through coordinated and nationally aligned strategies and actions which emphasise prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery. These resources are tailored to cultural and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The goal is to establish a comprehensive framework that systematically addresses the complexities of GBV and prioritises accountability, intersectionality, and person-centred coordination and integration.

Launched in 2022, the Plan spans a 10-year period (divided into two 5-year Action Plans). It supersedes the 2010-2022 National Plan and is a central pillar of Australia’s gender-focused policy, in conjunction with others like Working for Women: A strategy for gender equality (2024). The Plan is supported in implementation by the First Action Plan 2023-2027, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025, and the Outcomes Framework 2023-2032.

Focus areas	Safety
Date of publication	October 2022
Time frame of implementation/delivery	2022-2032 (divided into two 5-year periods)
Attributed stakeholders	Commonwealth Government
Investment	\$3.4 billion

National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children Outcomes Framework 2022-2032

The Framework outlines measurable targets and actions to prevent and reduce violence against women and children. It aims to guide the actions of the NPEVWC 2022-2032, track progress, and promote gender equality while emphasising an intersectional approach to address the diverse needs of different population groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.

National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children Theory of Change 2022-2023

A partner document to the NPEVWC 2022-2032, the Theory of Change explains the mechanics behind how and why we expect change to occur through implementation of the NPEVWC 2022-2032.

National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025

The Action Plan provides a specific and targeted action to address the disproportionate rates of violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. The Plan is designed to complement and interlink with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap 2020-2030 and family, domestic and sexual violence strategies.

Australian National Research Agenda to End Violence against Women and Children (ANRA) 2023-2028

ANRA supports the NPEVWC 2022-2032 through articulating current knowledge gaps and needs and outlining a rigorous methodological framework to address these that is inclusive, person-oriented and action-oriented. Its guidance on priority areas for DFSV research is designed for researchers, research organisations and universities; funding bodies (including philanthropic); policymakers and government; DFSV practitioners and services; survivor advocates and social enterprises.

Action Plan Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Higher Education

Aligning to and extending the NPEVWC 2022-2032, this document recognises the role of higher education providers in driving social change and creating safe environments for learning and work. It provides guiding principles and specific actions for the higher education sector.

A 10-year-plan to unleash the full capacity and contribution of women to the Australian economy 2023-2033

This report, initiated by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, provides an assessment of the current issues in women's economic outcomes and policy recommendations to address these.

Focus areas	Gender equality, economic development, career
Date of publication	October 2023
Time frame of implementation/delivery	2023-2033
Attributed stakeholders	Commonwealth Government, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Women's Economic Equality Taskforce
Investment	Unknown

Women’s Budget Statement 2023-2024

Published in May 2023, the budget aims to outline key measures to advance gender equality in Australia with a focus on achieving economic equality, ending violence against women, increasing women’s representation in leadership, and improving women’s health and wellbeing. It also aims to expand gender responsive budgeting to instil gender analysis across all government budget decision-making. The budget is intended to work in tandem with other policies, specifically the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2023 and Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality (2024).

Focus areas	Systems solutions, career, health, safety
Date of publication	May 2023
Time frame of implementation/delivery	2023-2024
Attributed stakeholders	Commonwealth Government, Minister for Finance, Minister for Women, Minister for the Public Service of the Commonwealth of Australia, the Treasurer
Investment	Unknown (at a total level)

National Women’s Alliance Model

The National Women’s Alliances (NWA) were established in 2010, with the model designed to create a more informed and representative dialogue between women and the Australian Government. The goal is to ensure that women’s perspectives and needs are incorporated into policy development by engaging with diverse groups within the women’s sector. In 2023, the Australian National University's Global Institute for Women's Leadership was tasked with evaluating the NWA Model. The objective of this evaluation was to determine the efficacy of the NWA model in ensuring that women's perspectives are communicated to and considered by the Government in policy development.

Focus areas	Systems solutions
Date of publication	2010
Time frame of implementation/delivery	Not applicable
Attributed stakeholders	Commonwealth Government, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Office for Women
Investment	Not applicable

Including Gender: An APS Guide to Gender Analysis and Gender Impact Assessment

Introduced in 2023, the APS Guide helps those in the Australian public service develop cabinet submissions and policy proposals that meet the government's gender analysis requirements. This guide supports the implementation of gender responsive budgeting.

Gender responsive budgeting incorporates the consideration of gendered impacts throughout the Budget process. This allows governments to identify and allocate funding to measures that reduce gender gaps while avoiding initiatives that unintentionally widen gender inequalities. Ultimately, the Guide is designed to support greater integration of gender in Australian policymaking.

Focus areas	Systems solutions
Date of publication	August 2023 (revised version published January 2024)
Time frame of implementation/delivery	Not applicable
Attributed stakeholders	Commonwealth Government, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Office for Women
Investment	Not applicable

1.1.2 State and Territory Frameworks and Policy

NSW Women’s Strategy 2023-2026

The strategy outlines targeted initiatives and policy interventions to address gender disparities, economic empowerment, safety, and leadership opportunities, following the previous NSW Women’s Strategy 2018-2022. It is led by an interdepartmental committee and involves various government agencies. The strategy works toward a whole-of-government approach.

Focus areas	Career, health, society, romantic relationships, safety, financial literacy
Date of publication	November 2022
Time frame of implementation/delivery	2023-2026
Attributed stakeholders	NSW Government
Investment	\$12.4 million

Victoria’s Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2027

The Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan is focused on driving systemic change, fostering inclusivity, and promoting gender equality across all sectors of society through implementation of various programs. It focuses on all stages of life - childhood, adolescence, young adult, middle age and senior years - and works across a range of sectors, including education, employment, leadership, health, and safety. The Strategy and Action Plan aligns to the broader policy landscape of gender equality initiatives in the state, including the Gender Equality Act 2020.

Focus areas	Education, career, health, society, safety
Date of publication	August 2023

Time frame of implementation/delivery	Active from 2023-2026
Attributed stakeholders	Victorian Government
Investment	\$8.3 million

WA’s Plan for Gender Equality; WA’s Second Action Plan 2021-2025: Progress Report 2022

It is created within Western Australia’s 10-year framework for coordinating efforts and resources across government, business, and community sectors to promote gender equality.

Focus areas	Health, safety, career
Date of publication	March 2020
Time frame of implementation/delivery	2021-2025
Attributed stakeholders	Western Australian Government, Minister for Women’s Interests
Investment	\$2.98 billion

Queensland’s Women’s Strategy 2022-2027

The strategy aims to enhance gender equality in response to a national call for safer and more equitable community standards. Created to build on the foundational efforts of the previous 2016-2021 Strategy, it addresses gaps in domestic violence response and economic participation of women.

The strategy fits into the broader policy landscape by aligning with the Queensland Government’s commitments to social justice, economic security, and public health.

Focus areas	Gender equality, social justice, health, safety
Date of publication	March 2022
Time frame of implementation/delivery	2022-2027
Attributed stakeholders	Queensland Government, Department of Justice and Attorney-General, Queensland Women’s Strategy Advisory Group
Investment	Unknown

Northern Territory Gender Equality Action Plan 2022-2025

The Action Plan is a foundational policy initiative aimed at cultivating gender equality within the Northern Territory. As the territory’s first strategy of this nature, it responds to persistent gender disparities and aligns with the NT Gender Equality Statement of Commitment (July 2020) as well as broader government objectives under the Northern Territory Social Outcomes Framework. The Action Plan is integrated with existing frameworks and national policies, such as the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, the Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence Reduction Framework, Everyone Together Aboriginal Affairs Strategy, NT Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework, NT Seniors Policy, Multicultural Policy for the NT. It also aligns with key work being undertaken at a national level including the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Report – Women’s Voices released by the Australian Human Rights Commission’s Australian Aboriginal Social Justice Commissioner.

Focus areas	Health, safety, career, society
Date of publication	March 2022
Time frame of implementation/delivery	2022-2025

Attributed stakeholders	Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities, Minister for Women, Youth and Seniors
Investment	Unknown

South Australia’s Women’s Equality Blueprint 2023-2026

The Blueprint serves as a comprehensive strategy aimed at promoting gender equality and empowering women to achieve their full potential. Its purpose is to guide policies and practices that promote women’s empowerment and participation in all aspects of society.

Focus areas	Education, career, health, society, safety
Date of publication	June 2023
Time frame of implementation/delivery	2023-2026
Attributed stakeholders	South Australian Government
Investment	\$15.725 million for 2023-2024

ACT Women’s Plan 2016-2026 - Third Action Plan

The Third Action Plan is the third of three plans that support implementation of the 2016-2026 ACT Women’s Plan. The Third Action Plan identifies five thematically derived priority areas (Health and Wellbeing, Housing and Homelessness, Safety, Economic Security, Leadership) and actionable initiatives for implementation with each.

Focus areas	Health, safety, career, society
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Date of publication	2016
Time frame of implementation/delivery	2016-2026
Attributed stakeholders	ACT Government, Minister for Women in the ACT
Investment	Unknown

Tasmanian Women’s Strategy 2018-2021

The Strategy provided a framework for government, private sector, and wider community to take action to achieve gender equality in Tasmania. It was designed as a continuation from The Women and Girls in Tasmania Report 2014, an initiative of the Tasmanian Women’s Plan.

Focus areas	Education, career, health, society, safety, financial literacy, family/friends, political agency, systems solutions
Date of publication	2018
Time frame of implementation/delivery	2018-2021
Attributed stakeholders	Department of Premier and Cabinet’s Women’s Policy Unit
Investment	Unknown

1.2 Effectiveness of Current Policy in Addressing Young Women’s Issues

These current frameworks and policy approaches were analysed for their effectiveness in addressing young women’s issues. This evaluation utilised metrics derived from best-practice approaches for effective and participatory policy, as defined by the OECD, UNDP, UN Women, UNICEF, UNEG and the Australian Government’s gender assessment guidelines. These metrics assessed if current frameworks and policies effectively mainstream gender at the intersection of age and other factors. This included evaluating the inclusion of young women and the long-term perspectives of these initiatives – inclusive design, participatory processes, clear accountability mechanisms, outcome measurement, and a sustainable empowerment approach. Further detail on these metrics, including definitions and guiding research questions, is outlined in Appendix 1 (note: available on request). This appendix contains the evaluation of all current frameworks and policy approaches identified. The results of these evaluations were interpreted thematically and categorised into the below areas for essential address and improvement.

Absence of longer-term perspectives

Across this literature review, frameworks and policy approaches typically covered a three-to-five-year period, with the longest stretching for ten years. However, in many cases, policies were implemented so recently (many from 2023 onwards) that specific assessments of effectiveness and areas for improvements cannot yet be ascertained. Consequently, these thematic areas for improvement largely focus on stated approaches and/or intentions within current frameworks and policy approaches.

Absence of effective consultation of and feedback loops for young women

Within frameworks and policy approaches, there is an absence of effective methods for consulting young women as a stand-alone population sub-segment. Alongside this, post-implementation feedback mechanisms, generally and for young women specifically, are limited in scope or entirely absent. Even those policy documents that demonstrate relative best practice within the Australian policy ecosystem tend to only incorporate either a) effective consultation, or b) considered feedback mechanisms. In creating new, and improving current, frameworks and policy approaches, it is essential to consider how consultation and feedback are built end-to-end in policy designs.

Consultation methods varied across frameworks and policy approaches, however references to engagement were most often observed as qualitative and/or quantitative research methods with young women included as research participants, alongside other population sub-segments. Positively, most current frameworks and policy approaches engaged in a mixed method approach, incorporating qualitative instruments such as one-on-one interviews, focus groups, co-design workshops and forums, and quantitative instruments such as surveys, enhancing accessibility to data and greater inclusion of a wider variety of voices. While specific numbers varied, or were inconclusively referenced, it appears that most frameworks and policy approaches conducted some form of consultation of women during their initial development phase – however, confirmation of young women consultation across all was inconclusive. At a federal level, n=3,000 stakeholders and a task force of 13 women were consulted in the development of the Women’s Budget Statement 2023-2024 – appearing the highest across federal documents reviewed, however there was no mention of specific consultation of young women. At a state/territory level, the highest number consulted appeared in the NSW Women’s Strategy 2023-2026,

with over n=2,000 women and girls (again, number non-specific to young women sub-segment) completing the 2022 NSW Women's Strategy 'Have Your Say' Survey. Across this review, the specific numbers of young women included in research instruments and the level to which research methods specifically focused on isolating young women's issues were largely inconclusive and/or lacking clear detail. This absence has resulted in an assessment that young women and young women's issues were typically underrepresented in these consultation processes.

This assessment also considered engagement via consultative practices through formats such as advisory councils, expert working groups, workshops, and other similar models where these population segments were requested to inform key stakeholders through sharing their lived experiences. However, there appeared to be limited detail on the extent to which these types of groups were typically recruited and engaged; how frequently they met; how these consultations were structured, no matter the frequency; and if the intent was to support their participation in the longer-term through sustained engagement (i.e., beyond a 3–6-month period). Without this detail, it is difficult to comprehensively assess their effectiveness.

Feedback loops appeared even more limited. While there was some mention of ongoing advisory committees and/or reference groups, outside of these, frameworks and policy approaches often leant heavily on informed target audiences or did not identify any structured mechanisms for feedback. For example, the Australian Government's DFSV Commission Plan 2023-2026, relies primarily on feedback from their Lived Experience Advisory Council, while more general feedback is received by submissions through phone and/or email. This latter approach requires engaged individuals to be aware of where and how they can provide/report their feedback, questions, and issues. Additionally, it does not facilitate more substantive feedback and there does not appear to be clear ownership of where and how this feedback will be treated once received. Across this review, feedback approaches appeared mostly static in nature, e.g., with feedback sought only during specific time periods (e.g., a prescribed period following implementation) and more dynamic approaches were absent. There appears a clear need to establish more effective channels for young women, and women more broadly, to submit and substantiate their feedback on critical policy areas; collect specific feedback; and subsequently implement this specific feedback in future iterations.

Lack of translation of needs into tangible objectives and programs specifically focused on young women

Tangible recognition of the unique challenges faced by young women in current frameworks and policy approaches is limited. While some reviewed policy documents referenced young women, and many distinguished them from other age segments, this did not necessarily translate into a clear, tangible and comprehensive assessment of their needs and how these could be specifically addressed through policy approaches. For example:

- *A 10-year plan to unleash the full capacity and contribution of women to the Australian economy 2023-2033* specifically mentions young women and their unique challenges in achieving economic equality and developing financial literacy, and identifies targeted approaches to addressing these challenges, namely education and economic empowerment initiatives. However, it lacks specific measures to address unique barriers young women face in our traditional

employment models, such as early pregnancy, GBV, and discrimination in typically male-dominated sectors. Additionally, there is no clear focus on creating specific training and education programs tailored for young women, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- The *Domestic Family Violence and Sexual Violence Commission (DFSVC) Strategic Plan 2023-2026* focuses on amplifying the voices of those with lived experiences but does not specify initiatives targeting young women or addressing their specific needs, such as safe housing and education continuation post-violence.
- Although the *National Women's Health Strategy 2020-2030* addresses various health issues, it does not provide comprehensive programs specifically for young women, particularly in mental health and reproductive health services tailored to their unique needs. The strategy does not sufficiently address the intersectional barriers young women face, such as those related to socio-economic status, disability, or cultural background, which are further exacerbated by their age.
- While promoting gender equality broadly, *Victoria's Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2027* lacks targeted actions to support young women in overcoming barriers such as early pregnancy, GBV, and access to higher education.
- The *Queensland's Women's Strategy 2022-2027* does not sufficiently address the unique challenges young women face in accessing economic opportunities and safe housing, particularly for those escaping violence.
- The *Northern Territory Gender Equality Action Plan 2022-2025* lacks detailed initiatives aimed at young women, particularly those from Indigenous communities, who face compounded barriers to education and employment.

It should be noted that some best practice approaches are emerging at the federal level. For example in the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children* there is a demonstrated awareness of the need for more tailored recognition of children and young women. In its implementation strategy, there are targeted 'Yarn Hub' events for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young women aged 7-18-years-old, providing a venue through which to facilitate tangible interventions for these community members. Ultimately, however, there appeared a tendency to indirectly infer that policies may target and deliver effective outcomes for young women, while reducing the number of specific proposals targeting young women. While arguably an intersectional approach is necessary to effectively meet the broad objectives set out in gender-based policy approaches, the lack of explicit targeting of policy toward addressing young women's issues, especially given considerable evidence and recognition of their heightened vulnerability and unique challenges, reduces their ability to solve these issues in the long-term or achieve the intergenerational progress goals adopted by the government.

Absence of effective evaluation capabilities to measure progress on an ongoing basis

As noted earlier, the time-based nature of many of these frameworks and policy approaches means that these details on impact and evaluation metrics have likely not yet been developed. As such, this review was directed toward references of clear metrics or goals that support an assessment of impact and that demonstrated a longer-term perspective toward measurement and evaluation.

Across this review, most policy documents at the federal level incorporated short-term and long-term methods to evaluate success, however specific details on these monitoring and evaluation capabilities

were often limited – once more reducing the potential for a comprehensive assessment to be conducted. For example, the Federal Women’s Budget 2023-2024 was absent from any mention of any evaluation capabilities, while others that did mention these capabilities such as the Australian Government’s *A 10-year plan to unleash the full capacity and contribution of women to the Australian economy 2023-2033*, tended to focus more on qualitative assessments by policymakers of impact, as opposed to hard data and/or quantitative approaches. Further, the NPEVWC includes an Outcomes Framework and plans for an Impact Evaluation to be conducted in 2026 but as of yet lacks detailed, ongoing evaluation metrics; the National Women’s Health Strategy 2020-2030 outlines broad health priorities and provides ‘key measures of success’ under each policy area however its evaluation approach is centred on reporting progress to its Implementation Steering Group, a longer-term assessment incorporating 12-month, three-year and five-year development checks and regular public reporting of health outcomes, of which these outcomes could be considered the impact of other policy approaches. Proposed evaluations were also most often anticipated at two-to-five-year increments and released through ‘progress reports’, rather than ongoing and dynamic mechanisms to evaluate evidence of change. Such limitations in specific monitoring and evaluation capabilities were noted by the National Women’s Alliance Evaluation, which “[suggested] the need for more comprehensive assessments, including outcome data from the perspectives of women themselves.”

The poor and often divergent evaluation capabilities lead to the view that rather than each agency or department designing its own evaluation methods, there needs to be a streamlined and standardised approach to evaluation that is accessible and transparent. This would ensure consistency in measuring progress and allow for easier comparison and understanding of how initiatives are performing. The Australian Centre for Evaluation or Office of Impact Analysis could play a crucial role in this process. This office could develop and oversee the implementation of standardised evaluation frameworks across all levels of government and specific agencies. By doing so, it would enhance accountability, and ensure that evaluation results are accessible to all stakeholders, thereby improving the overall effectiveness of gender policies and other initiatives, some of which was highlighted by the 2019 Thodey review.⁴⁵

Lack of integrated approaches with and between stakeholders

Finally, this review demonstrated emergent silos across government levels, and specific agencies/departments/task forces. Between state/territory and federal levels, there does appear to be complementary developments in current frameworks and policy approaches and a desire to work in tandem with one another to achieve national community change. However, across policy documents, particularly at the federal level, there did not appear strong recognition of the need to collaborate to achieve the desired outcomes. Ultimately, there are multiple frameworks and policies working in tandem, purely by accident, with minimal intentional engagement across initiatives.

⁴⁵ “OUR PUBLIC SERVICE OUR FUTURE INDEPENDENT REVIEW of the AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SERVICE.” n.d. <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/independent-review-aps.pdf>

Specifically, for example:

- The DFSVC Strategic Plan 2023-2026 aims to foster collaboration across sectors but does not specify how it will coordinate with other federal or state agencies. The plan mentions collaboration with the Department of Social Services but lacks detailed mechanisms for inter-agency cooperation or alignment with state-level initiatives.
- The National Women's Health Strategy 2020-2030 involves the Commonwealth Government and the Department of Aged Care but does not outline specific collaborative efforts with state health departments or other federal agencies.
- Integration Gaps: While the NPEVWC 2022-2032 emphasises a coordinated approach, it does not detail how federal, state, and territory governments will work together.
- Despite the broad consultation process, the Women's Budget Statement 2023-2024 does not specify mechanisms for ongoing collaboration between the Commonwealth Government, the Minister for Finance, the Minister for Women, and other relevant departments.



MAP TO WORKING FOR WOMEN

To ensure the utility of the Young Women's Policy Submission (YWPS), we mapped our research methods (surveys, interviews, literature reviews, and expert consultations) onto the aims of Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality, with a particular focus on the 'Future Directions.'

We combined primary and secondary research methodologies to ensure a holistic assessment of the problem set, specifically:

- literature review to understand current state knowledge and best practice approaches, as well as identify knowledge gaps and determine what additional information needs were required through alternative research methods,
- nationally representative quantitative survey to test hypotheses emerging from the literature review and document the lived experiences of young people (ages 18-28), with the aim to provide a baseline, comparative assessment for young women and men,
- long-form interviews with young people (ages 18-28) to document their lived experiences and ensure their perspectives and proposed solutions were central to our recommended approach, and
- expert consultations with thought leaders from academia and the public sector to validate emerging findings, provide a point of view on best practice approaches, and unpack complex policy challenges to identify potential solutions.

These methods supported collection of rich, in-depth qualitative and quantitative data. From here, we developed policy ideas to address each aim, co-designing with young people throughout this process. Notably, policy recommendations were carefully crafted in accessible language so young people could easily understand and assess their potential impact on their lives. This thorough approach aims to provide a robust evidence base, support informed decision-making, and offer actionable policy recommendations to advance the goals of Working for Women.

In Appendix 2, the specific aims we selected, mapped to our research methods. We also provide sample research questions that guided these methods and/or were asked of research participants targeting these specific aims.



AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY

2.1 The Situation

What does existing research say about young people's, particularly young women's experiences?

2.1.1 General Attitudes Towards Gender Equality

Younger Australians generally reject gender inequality at similar levels to the broader population. Within this, a significant gender divide exists. Approximately 43% of young women reject attitudes that underpin gender inequality, compared to only 20% of young men.⁴⁶ Young women are more likely to embrace progressive views on gender equality, whereas young men tend to hold more conservative attitudes.

A sizeable proportion of young Australians believe that gender inequality is exaggerated. Around 45% think many women exaggerate the extent of their unequal treatment, with young men (52%) significantly more likely to hold this belief than young women (37%).⁴⁷ This underlines the irony of gender issues: denial of the existence of the problem is a symptom of the problem itself. This normalises gender inequality and leads to passivity and resistance.

Young women are more likely to recognise gender inequality than young men. Approximately 75% of young women agree that women and girls receive fewer opportunities and unequal treatment compared to men and boys, whereas only 53.6% of young men agree.⁴⁸

There is a belief among young men that men should take control in relationships, with approximately 13% of them believing this, and 27% believing that women prefer when men take control.⁴⁹

Many young men adhere to traditionally masculine sentiments.⁵⁰ Significant pressure is felt regarding always acting strong (50% of younger men), using violence to gain respect (34% of younger men vs. 24% of older men), emotional stoicism (42%), fighting back (30%), and self-sufficiency (28%). Agreement with norms such as trans men not being "real men" (39%), the necessity for men to look good but not fuss about appearance (32%), and that men should be the primary financial providers (31%) is also prevalent.

More than half (52%) of Australians believe that both female and male business leaders are equally capable of creating a financially successful organisation. However, female leaders are perceived to be better at ensuring ethical operations (17% compared to 7% for male leaders).

2.1.2 Violence and Gender Roles

Young people who support rigid gender roles are more likely to hold attitudes supportive of VAW and commit VAW.⁵¹ Specifically, strong endorsement of traditional masculinity correlates with a 17-fold

⁴⁶ "Status of Women Report Card 2024 | Working for Women." 2024. [genderequality.gov.au](https://genderequality.gov.au/status-women-report-cards/2024-report-card). March 7, 2024.

⁴⁷ "Masculinities and Health: Attitudes towards Men and Masculinities in Australia Masculinities and Health: Attitudes towards Men and Masculinities in Australia 2." n.d. <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/VicHealth-Attitudes-to-men-and-masculinity-report-July-2020.pdf>.

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ "Attitudes Matter: The 2021 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS), Findings for Australia - ANROWS - Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety." 2024. ANROWS - Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. July 4, 2024. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/attitudes-matter-the-2021-national-community-attitudes-towards-violence-against-women-survey-ncas-findings-for-australia/>.

⁵⁰ Jesuit Social Services. (2024). *The Man Box: Re-examining what it means to be a man in Australia*. Retrieved from <https://jss.org.au/programs/research/the-man-box/>.

⁵¹ Jesuit Social Services. (2024). *The Man Box: Re-examining what it means to be a man in Australia*. Retrieved from <https://jss.org.au/programs/research/the-man-box/>.

increase in violence-supportive attitudes, including disbelief in gender inequality and coercive control in relationships.⁵² Men who strongly endorse these rules are 8 times more likely to commit sexual violence against an intimate partner and 5 times more likely to commit physical violence against an intimate partner.⁵³

2.1.3 Economic and Leadership Challenges

A gender pay gap emerges immediately after university graduation, with full-time starting salaries for bachelor's graduates averaging \$69,000 for men and \$67,000 for women.⁵⁴ This early disparity is a precursor for ongoing economic inequality between genders.

Women aged 15-64 years perform an average of 55.4 hours of work per week, 2 hours more than men, with 34.7 of these hours being unpaid.⁵⁵ The unequal distribution of unpaid work exacerbates gender inequality in economic opportunities.

Women are underrepresented in leadership positions, holding only 35.7% of ASX200 board positions and only 14 companies with female CEOs. This lack of representation likely influences public perceptions. Just over half (52%) of Australians believe that female leaders are as adept at creating financially successful organisations as their male counterparts. However, female leaders are perceived to be better at ensuring ethical operations (17% compared to 7% for male leaders).⁵⁶

Further, women remain significantly underrepresented in Australian media, with men continuing to dominate newsrooms, according to the Women in Media 2023 gender scorecard.⁵⁷ Men constitute 70% of quoted sources and 66% of experts in news stories. Men also dominate by-line authorship, especially in areas like sports, where 82% of authors are male compared to just 18% female. Similarly, political coverage is predominantly authored by male journalists. In the business and finance sectors, the gender imbalance persists, with men representing 59% and 63% of authors, respectively. Women in Media's research partner, Isentia, analysed 18,346 press, radio, and TV news reports over a two-week period from 18-31 July last year as part of the study. Despite some progress towards gender parity, with a 10% increase in women's by-line share since 2016, male voices continue to be prioritised. Women in Media's strategic adviser, Petra Buchanan, noted that while there has been progress, the report explains that gender parity in Australian media is still at least a decade away.

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ "Status of Women Report Card 2023 | Working for Women." 2023. Genderequality.gov.au. March 8, 2023. <https://genderequality.gov.au/status-women-report-cards/2023-report-card>.

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Ipsos. 2024. "Australians Divided on Whether Gender Equality Has Gone Far Enough." Ipsos. Ipsos. March 5, 2024. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-au/international-womens-day-2024>.

⁵⁷ Guardian Australia. (2023, February 13). "Women still vastly underrepresented in Australian media, report says." The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2023/feb/13/women-still-vastly-underrepresented-in-australian-media-report-says>

2.1.4 Mental Health and Well-being

Mental health is a significant issue for young Australians, with 33.9% identifying it as one of the most important issues in the country.⁵⁸ Additionally, 38.5% of young people are 'extremely' or 'very concerned' about their mental health.⁵⁹ There has been a three-fold increase in intentional self-harm hospitalisations for young girls over the past decade.⁶⁰

2.2 Primary Research

What does YWA research, including our survey, interviews, literature reviews, and expert consultations, say about young people's, particularly young women's experience?

2.2.1 Survey Findings

2.2.1.1 Contributing Factors - Men are Better than Women

Survey respondents were asked to score which factors most perpetuate the belief that men are better and deserve more rights and/or opportunities than women. Respondents scored them in the following order (most to least contribution):

(*Note: All scores out of 8. Mean scores reported for the total gender sample.)

1. Gender Roles (specific roles or jobs society expects women and men to do)

Gender roles significantly influence attitudes towards gender inequality. Both men and women scored traditional gender roles as the highest contributing factor (5.67 for men; 5.39 for women) as these roles deem that men should dominate leadership and decision-making, while women should occupy supportive and caregiving roles.

2. Sexualisation of Women (seeing women sexualised across various mediums)

The sexualisation of women is a significant contributing factor. Men (5.19) scored it higher than women (4.49). This disparity suggests that men are more likely to be aware of female sexualisation in society and to regard this as an indication of women's inferiority. Higher-income males, in particular, rated this factor significantly higher, indicating that socio-economic status may exacerbate these attitudes.

⁵⁸ "Mission Australia's Youth Survey 2022 Reveals Young People's Biggest Concerns." 2022. Missionaustralia.com.au. November 29, 2022. <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/media-centre/media-releases/mission-australia-s-youth-survey-2022-reveals-young-people-s-biggest-concerns>.

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ "Intentional Self-Harm Hospitalisations by Age Groups." 2023. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. September 11, 2023. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/data/intentional-self-harm-hospitalisations/intentional-self-harm-hospitalisations-by-age-sex>.

3. Economic Systems (financial structures where men are at the top)

Men (5.06) scored economic systems slightly higher than women (4.69). Thus, current economic systems, which favour men, contribute to the belief that they deserve more rights and/or opportunities than women.

4. Insecurity (feelings of confusion and inadequacy about men’s role in a progressive society)

Insecurity is a notable factor. Men scored this 4.58 compared to women who scored it 4.31. However, among males, those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent scored insecurity as a lower factor compared to non-Indigenous males. Cultural and identity factors may influence the level of insecurity felt by different groups as others groups acquire rights and power, and the extent to which they aspire for social recognition.

5. Religion (some religious texts promote male leadership and authority)

Religion also influences beliefs about gender roles and superiority. Both genders scored this factor similarly (4.40 for men; 4.28 for women).

6. Copying Others' Behaviour (learning and copying the behaviour of male figures)

Copying others’ behaviour propagates gender inequality. Men (4.50) scored this higher than females (4.16); demonstrating how social learning and peer influence inform gender inequality.

7. Porn (seeing men dominate and be violent towards women in porn)

Pornographic content reinforces harmful stereotypes and objectification of women; porn, much of which is violent, shows men being violent towards and/or dominating women. The consumption of porn was a more significant contributing factor for men (4.00) than women (3.83). Notably, males of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent scored porn as a higher factor than their non-Indigenous counterparts.

8. Day-to-Day Interactions (among the people I talk to, men are generally better than women)

Men (4.13) scored day-to-day interactions higher than women (3.23).

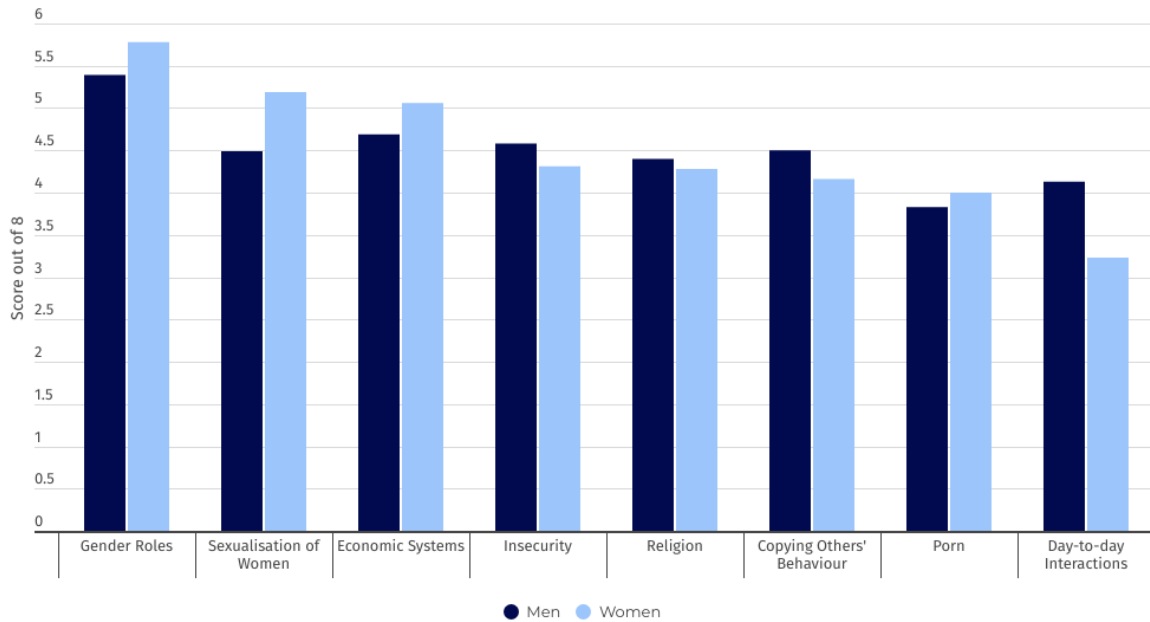
Table 1: Factors contributing to the belief that men are better and deserve more rights and/or opportunities than women by gender

Factor contributing to belief that men are better and deserve more rights and/or opportunities than women	Gender Identity	
	Men	Women
Gender Roles	5.39 (5.00)	5.78 (6.00)

Sexualisation of Women	4.49 (4.00)	5.19 (5.00)
Economic Systems	4.69 (5.00)	5.06 (5.00)
Insecurity	4.58 (5.00)	4.31 (4.00)
Religion	4.40 (4.00)	4.28 (4.00)
Copying Others' Behaviour	4.50 (4.00)	4.16 (4.00)
Porn	3.83 (3.00)	4.00 (4.00)
Day-to-day Interactions	4.13 (4.00)	3.23 (3.00)

(*Note: Mean (Median))

Figure 1: Factors contributing to the belief that men are better and deserve more rights and/or opportunities than women by gender



2.2.1.2 Intersection of Gender & Australian Society

Rating opinions on societal values and attitudes, on a 10-point scale, women express greater concern about how men are raised and the daily oppression they face under the patriarchy. Men are more likely to believe that society values men and women equally. Further, men demonstrate a stronger belief in their ability to influence Australian society.

Both genders agree that social media perpetuates negative gender stereotypes, with men endorsing this more strongly.

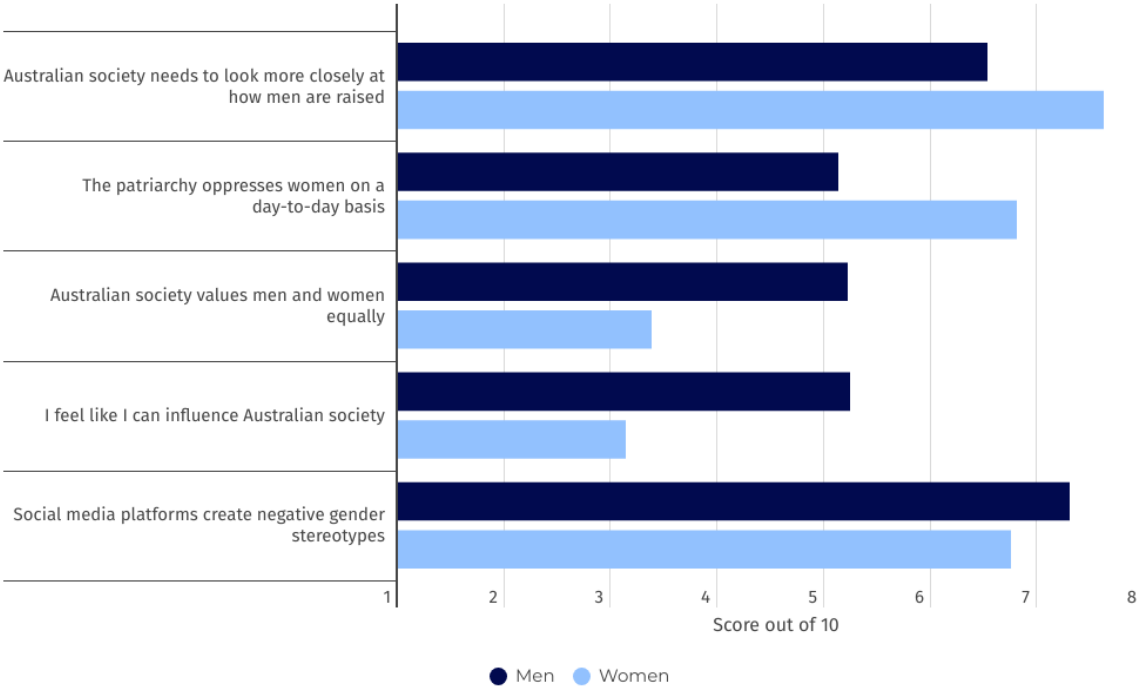
Table 2: Australian Society by gender

Variable	Gender Identity	
	Men	Women
Australian society needs to look more closely at how men are raised	6.53 (7.00)	7.62 (8.00)
The patriarchy oppresses women on a day-to-day basis	5.13 (5.00)	6.81 (7.00)

Australian society values men and women equally	5.22 (5.00)	3.38 (3.00)
I feel like I can influence Australian society	5.24 (5.00)	3.14 (3.00)
Social media platforms create negative gender stereotypes	7.30 (7.00)	6.75 (6.00)

(*Note: Mean (Median))

Figure 2: Australian Society by gender



2.2.1.3 Solution Preferences of Men with High & Low Perpetration of GBV

Preferences of men reporting no perpetration and perpetration of GBV were compared. In YWA’s survey, male respondents were asked: for you personally, what would be most effective in improving your views about and behaviours toward women?

All men highly value (out of 10) “finding a way to feel better about myself and my role in society; having more life purpose.” Notably, men reporting perpetration of GBV value this even more. There appears a universal male desire for personal and societal validation, particularly among those whose actions

perpetuate inequality. Both groups similarly value interventions like being friends with a different crowd, having more female friends, spending less time on social media, not watching porn, male-led discussion groups, mentorship programs, interactive workshops, media literacy programs, and gender equality festivals.

Additionally, the data reveals other demographic differences:

- Non-White/EU respondents place more importance on finding a way to feel better about themselves and not watching porn compared to White/EU respondents. A media literacy program is significantly more valued by Non-White/EU respondents as an intervention.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents placed significantly less importance on finding a way to feel better about themselves, male-led discussion groups, and media literacy programs compared to non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents.
- Male-led discussion groups addressing issues of masculinity and gender were significantly less valued by respondents from remote or regional areas compared to those from cities.

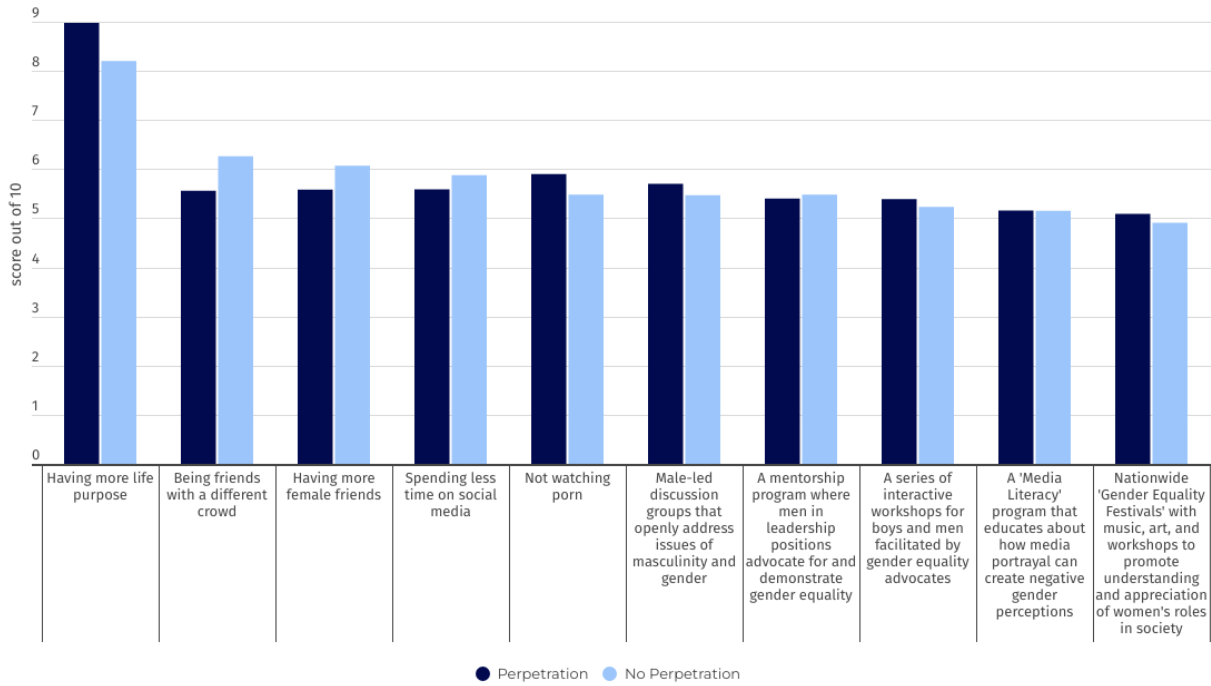
Table 3: Most effective measure to improve views about and behaviours toward women by GBV Perpetration Score

For you personally, what would be most effective in improving your views about and behaviours toward women?	GBV Perpetration	
	Perpetration	No Perpetration
Finding a way to feel better about myself and my role in society; having more life purpose	8.98 (9.00)	8.20 (8.00)
Being friends with a different crowd	5.56 (5.00)	6.26 (6.00)
Having more female friends	5.58 (5.00)	6.07 (6.00)
Spending less time on social media	5.59 (5.00)	5.88 (6.00)
Not watching porn	5.90 (6.00)	5.48 (5.00)
Male-led discussion groups that openly address issues of masculinity and gender	5.70 (5.00)	5.47 (5.00)

A mentorship program where men in leadership positions advocate for and demonstrate gender equality	5.40 (5.00)	5.48 (5.00)
A series of interactive workshops for boys and men facilitated by gender equality advocates	5.39 (5.00)	5.23 (5.00)
A 'Media Literacy' program that educates about how media portrayal can create negative gender perceptions	5.16 (5.00)	5.15 (5.00)
Nationwide 'Gender Equality Festivals' with music, art, and workshops to promote understanding and appreciation of women's roles in society	5.09 (5.00)	4.91 (5.00)

(*Note: Mean (Median))

Figure 3: Most effective measure to improve views about and behaviours toward women by GBV Perpetration Score



2.2.2 Interview Insights

Participants explored how young Australians’ perspectives on gender equality are shaped by persistent gender inequality and societal expectations, education, media, and evolving cultural attitudes.

2.2.2.1 Theme 1: Persistent Gender Inequality and Societal Expectations

Summary of main points:

1. Gender inequality in Australia manifests in subtle and overt ways, affecting young women's educational pursuits, career trajectories, and personal relationships.
2. Systemic biases in institutions continue to favour men in leadership and authority positions, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of male dominance in decision-making roles.
3. Young women face the paradoxical pressure to "have it all" - balancing career ambitions, personal relationships, and societal expectations of femininity and caregiving.
4. Misogyny and sexism are deeply embedded in everyday language and social interactions, often disguised as humour or tradition, making them difficult to challenge.
5. Rural areas present unique challenges, with more pronounced gender biases and limited access to resources that support gender equality initiatives.
6. The gap between perceived progress in gender equality and young women's lived experiences creates a dissonance that can lead to feelings of invalidation and frustration.

Representative quotes:

1. "I don't know how we're going to start to see women as equals in the home, in the workplace until we are seeing both [genders] take on the same roles"
2. "And I just feel like women and gender diverse people, we're born having to prove ourselves when men are born saying, I'm worthy."
3. "We can't live in this world where we pretend that young women don't have their unique experiences, and everything's equal for them. It's not, that's not a reality."
4. "Growing up in rural Australia, I will speak to the rural situation. Attitudes towards women and girls were very much: somebody's a slut, somebody's a prude, somebody's a numb. And that's it. That's all you can be."
5. "Government policy and social change have meant an increase in accessibility for women - we can be in spaces and places. But that hasn't translated into embracing and welcoming women to exist in these spaces."
6. "I think it all comes back to when we're kids and this huge divide is made between men and women."

Words most mentioned:



Problems most mentioned:

1. Persistent gender stereotypes and role expectations that limit women's choices and opportunities
2. Unequal distribution of power and authority in institutions, perpetuating male dominance in decision-making roles
3. Normalisation of misogynistic language and behaviour in everyday interactions
4. Pressure on women to excel in multiple, often conflicting roles without adequate support
5. Lack of recognition for women's contributions and capabilities in professional settings
6. More pronounced gender biases in rural areas, exacerbated by limited resources and traditional attitudes

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Implementing comprehensive education programs on gender issues and equality, starting from early childhood
2. Promoting and supporting positive male role models who actively champion gender equality
3. Developing and enforcing inclusive policies in workplaces and institutions to ensure equal opportunities and representation
4. Creating mentorship and support networks for women in various fields, especially in male-dominated industries
5. Investing in rural-specific gender equality initiatives that address unique challenges and leverage community strengths
6. Encouraging men's active participation in domestic and caregiving roles to balance responsibilities and challenge traditional norms

Insights:

1. The persistence of gender inequality despite legal and policy changes suggests a need for deeper cultural and attitudinal shifts.
2. The pressure on young women to "have it all" reflects a societal failure to adequately restructure work and family systems to accommodate changing gender roles.
3. The rural-urban divide in gender attitudes highlights the importance of context-specific approaches to promoting equality.
4. The dissonance between perceived progress and lived experiences of young women underscores the need for more nuanced measurements and discussions of gender equality.

2.2.2.2 Theme 2: The Role of Education and Early Intervention**Summary of main points:**

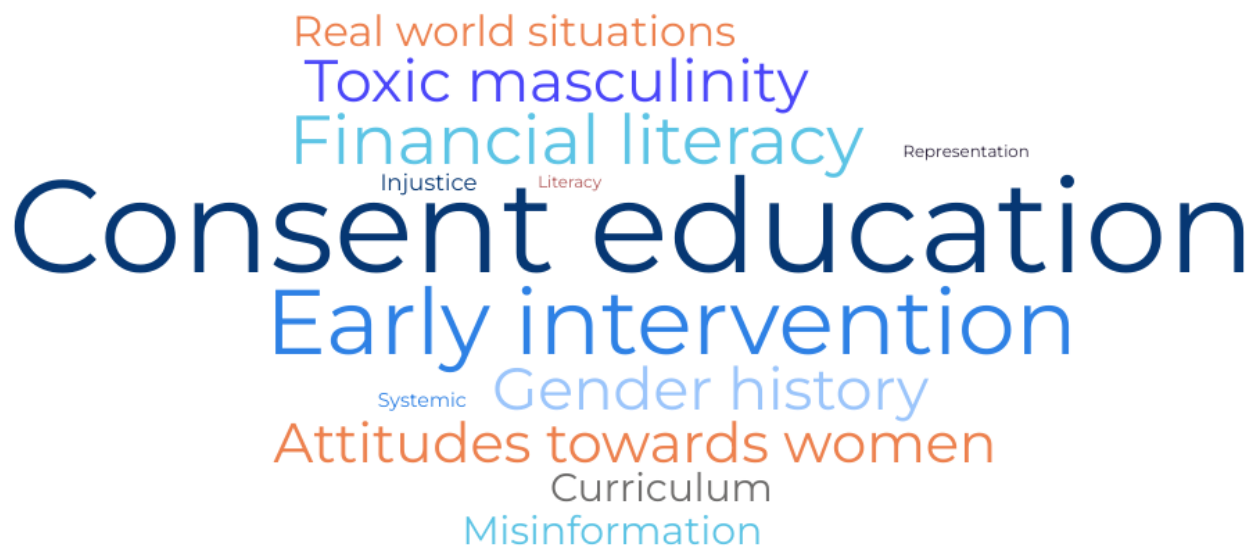
1. Schools play a pivotal role in shaping gender attitudes, often inadvertently reinforcing stereotypes, and normalising problematic behaviours.
2. Current educational curricula frequently fail to adequately prepare young women for real-world challenges, including workplace discrimination and personal safety issues.

3. Early intervention is crucial in addressing toxic masculinity, with experts suggesting that middle school may already be too late to effectively counter ingrained attitudes.
4. Consent education is often superficial or entirely absent, failing to address the complexities of real-life situations and power dynamics.
5. There's a significant gap in education about historical and current social injustices, limiting young people's understanding of systemic inequalities.
6. Media literacy education is increasingly vital but often overlooked, leaving young people vulnerable to harmful online influences and misinformation.

Representative quotes:

1. "I definitely didn't have enough support at school. There was no preparation for the real world. Absolutely none at all."
2. "I think, injustice and oppression in society through a historic context, but I don't think it wasn't really taught in the current context."
3. "Intervening at middle school age is too late to address toxic masculinity."
4. "I think it all comes back to when we're kids and this huge divide is made between men and women."
5. "Poor views about women start at schools. Poor behaviours toward women start at schools."

Words most mentioned:



Problems most mentioned:

1. Inadequate preparation in schools for real-world gender-based challenges and discrimination
2. Lack of comprehensive, age-appropriate consent education that addresses power dynamics and real-life complexities
3. Insufficient early intervention programs to address toxic masculinity and harmful gender attitudes
4. Limited education on historical and current social injustices, hampering understanding of systemic inequalities

5. Lack of robust media literacy education to combat online misinformation and harmful influences
6. Persistence of gender divides in educational settings, reinforcing stereotypes from an early age

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Developing and implementing a comprehensive, age-appropriate gender equality curriculum from early childhood through higher education
2. Creating evidence-based, scenario-driven consent education programs that address power dynamics and real-world situations
3. Establishing early intervention initiatives focused on positive masculinity and emotional intelligence for young boys
4. Enhancing history and social studies curricula to include in-depth exploration of past and present social injustices and their impacts
5. Integrating advanced media literacy education to equip students with critical thinking skills for navigating online information
6. Implementing programs that actively challenge gender stereotypes in educational settings, including in subject choices and career guidance

Insights:

1. The failure of schools to adequately prepare young women for real-world challenges suggests a disconnect between educational goals and societal realities.
2. The emphasis on early intervention for addressing toxic masculinity highlights the deeply ingrained nature of gender attitudes and the challenge of changing them later in life.
3. The lack of comprehensive consent education reflects a broader societal discomfort with discussing sexuality and power dynamics openly.
4. The gap in education about historical and current injustices may contribute to a lack of understanding and empathy for ongoing equality struggles.

2.2.2.3 Theme 3: Media Influence and Representation

Summary of main points:

- Media and social media play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of gender roles, often reinforcing harmful stereotypes and unrealistic expectations.
- Women are frequently sexualised and objectified in media portrayals, contributing to their devaluation in society and impacting young women's self-esteem.
- Social media platforms create environments where women face constant judgement and harassment, affecting their self-expression and mental health.
- There's a significant underrepresentation of women in professional and leadership roles in media portrayals, limiting the visibility of female role models.
- The film industry exhibits stark gender disparities, with male directors less likely to feature complex female characters, perpetuating a male-dominated narrative.
- Exposure to violent and derogatory content, including easily accessible pornography, distorts young people's perceptions of healthy relationships and consent.

Representative quotes:

1. "I feel like especially young boys watching violent pornographic videos, I think it really just drills home. If they already sort of have an inclination that that is how women should be treated, I think it just really gets the ball rolling in that aspect."
2. "The internet's a lawless place. Social media is a lawless place."
3. "We saw a lot of TV shows like Degrassi that were massively discussing these topics and I think that that may have contributed to the shift."
4. "Young people are very impressionable and I think social media takes advantage of this especially when today's young people are the age of young people that have grown up around social media and have had kind of unlimited access to that"
5. "It's taking gender-based violence and like women seriously online and not having such a tolerance for misogyny on online spaces."

Words most mentioned:



Problems most mentioned:

1. Pervasive sexualisation and objectification of women in media, reinforcing their devaluation in society
2. Significant underrepresentation of women in professional and leadership roles in media portrayals
3. Widespread availability of violent and derogatory content online, including easily accessible pornography
4. Social media environments that subject women to constant judgement and harassment
5. Lack of effective regulation in online spaces, allowing unchecked spread of misogynistic content
6. Gender disparity in the film industry leading to limited complex female character representations

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Implementing more stringent regulations on content and advertising that sexualise or objectify women
2. Promoting and incentivising diverse representations of women in media, especially in professional and leadership roles
3. Developing comprehensive media literacy programs that teach critical analysis of media representations
4. Creating and enforcing stricter policies against harassment and hate speech on social media platforms
5. Supporting initiatives to increase women's representation in key creative roles in the film and television industry
6. Encouraging the creation of content that addresses gender issues thoughtfully and promotes healthy relationship models

Insights:

1. The pervasive nature of media influence highlights the need for a multi-faceted approach to addressing gender representation issues.
2. The impact of social media on young women's self-esteem and mental health suggests a need for both platform-level changes and individual resilience-building strategies.
3. The underrepresentation of women in media-portrayed professional roles may contribute to real-world gender disparities in career aspirations and achievements.
4. The ease of access to violent and pornographic content online presents a significant challenge in shaping healthy attitudes towards relationships and consent.

2.2.2.4 Theme 4: Cultural Change and Societal Attitudes**Summary of main points:**

1. There's a critical need for comprehensive cultural change to dismantle deeply ingrained stereotypes and promote genuine gender equality.
2. Feminism is often misunderstood and stigmatised, leading to reluctance among both women and men to identify with or support the movement.
3. Men's involvement in gender equality discussions and efforts is crucial but often lacking, partly due to defensiveness and partly due to societal expectations of masculinity.
4. Societal attitudes that dehumanise women contribute significantly to sexual violence, with victim-blaming and normalisation of aggressive behavior still prevalent.
5. There's a persistent denial and reluctance to acknowledge the reality of gender inequality, especially among those who benefit from the current system.
6. Intergenerational impacts of discrimination continue to affect young women's experiences, with attitudes and behaviours often passed down through families and communities.

Representative quotes:

1. "It was almost a badge of honour to say 'I'm not a feminist.'"

2. "Men need to hear about gender issues more than women do."
3. "People often don't worry about issues that don't affect them."
4. "I think about myself, and I was raised in a family where racism was rife, that was the norm. I went to school. That was not on. I learnt better. My values shifted."
5. "Normalising respectful conversations about women makes it easier for men to conform."
6. "Us talking about male chauvinism and male violence makes men immediately jump on the defence."

Words most mentioned:



Problems most mentioned:

1. Widespread misunderstanding and stigmatisation of feminism, limiting its appeal and effectiveness
2. Lack of meaningful male involvement in gender equality efforts and discussions
3. Persistent societal attitudes that dehumanise women, contributing to sexual violence and discrimination
4. Denial and reluctance to acknowledge the reality and extent of gender inequality
5. Intergenerational transmission of discriminatory attitudes and behaviours
6. Societal pressure to conform to harmful gender norms, affecting both women and men

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Developing and implementing comprehensive cultural change programs that address gender equality at all levels of society
2. Creating initiatives that encourage and facilitate men's active participation in gender equality efforts
3. Launching public awareness campaigns that combat harmful stereotypes and promote respect for women

4. Establishing programs that address the intergenerational impacts of discrimination and promote positive value shifts
5. Fostering safe spaces for open, honest discussions about gender issues, including men's groups focused on positive masculinity
6. Promoting empathy-building exercises and experiences that help individuals understand and care about issues that may not directly affect them

Insights:

1. The stigmatisation of feminism reflects a broader societal discomfort with challenging established power structures and norms.
2. The lack of men's involvement in gender equality efforts highlights the need for approaches that engage men without defensiveness and demonstrate the benefits of equality for all.
3. The persistence of attitudes that dehumanise women, despite increased awareness, suggests that cognitive understanding alone is insufficient for true cultural change.
4. The intergenerational nature of discriminatory attitudes underscores the long-term commitment required for meaningful societal transformation.
5. The role of conformity in perpetuating harmful gender norms indicates that creating new, positive social expectations could be a powerful tool for change.

2.2.3 Literature Review

YWA conducted a literature review to scrutinise the persistent challenges and barriers in gender mainstreaming.⁶¹ This analysis was crucial to evaluate initiatives across various contexts (international, European, Australian), pinpoint patterns of success and failure, and extract key lessons. The goal of YWA is to generate policy recommendations based on empirical evidence and past learnings.

Challenges in gender mainstreaming include:

Inconsistent Implementation and Lack of Hard Incentives

Hafner-Burton and Pollack's research on the EU shows that gender mainstreaming has not led to consistent and effective implementation. They argue this is due to reliance on 'soft' incentives like persuasion rather than 'hard' incentives such as mandates and rewards. The European Commission's use of 'hard' incentives in equal opportunities for men and women officials demonstrated more rapid and quantifiable progress compared to gender mainstreaming efforts. Hence, the strategy itself may not be flawed, but rather its implementation and the lack of concrete incentives are problematic.

Structural and Institutional Barriers

Sarikakis and Nguyen's study on the EU media policy framework demonstrates that gender mainstreaming has failed due to specific structural and institutional barriers, including the influence of particular interests and the structure of opportunities within the Directorate-General responsible for policy areas. Prügl's research identifies mechanisms of power that hinder gender mainstreaming: co-optation,

⁶¹ Gender mainstreaming is a strategy for integrating gender perspectives and addressing gender inequalities across all levels of policy-making, planning, and implementation in order to achieve gender equality. (United Nations, 1997)

normalisation, and state refusal. These mechanisms slow down progress, indicating that the failure is not just in the strategy itself but in the resistance it faces within existing power structures.

Tension with Feminist Theory

Zalewski's work highlights the complex relationship between gender mainstreaming and feminist theory. Some argue that mainstreaming has led to a form of post-feminist practice that dilutes feminist goals. There is a debate about whether feminists should "take a break from feminism" (as suggested by Janet Halley) or continue to engage with institutions implementing gender mainstreaming. This tension suggests that the strategy's failure might partly lie in its divergence from core feminist principles.

Policy Softening and Institutional Weakening

Stratigaki's research on the EU reveals that gender mainstreaming has been used as an alibi to neutralise positive action. This has led to policy softening and institutional weakening due to resistance from political and administrative hierarchies within the EU. Specifically, the successful implementation of positive action in political decision-making challenged the gender distribution of political power, leading to this backlash. This indicates that gender mainstreaming's failure is partly due to it being co-opted and misused by existing power structures.

Transnational Processes and Intersectionality

Walby's work shows that gender mainstreaming often involves transnational processes and networks, creating tensions due to differing models of gender equality across countries and cultures. The strategy struggles to adequately address the intersection of gender with other complex forms of inequality like race, class, and sexuality. Hence, the failure of gender mainstreaming might be due to its inability to address the full complexity of gender issues in a global context.

Uneven Development and Implementation

Rees's study on Europe shows uneven development in the adoption of gender mainstreaming tools across countries. A few examples exist of gender mainstreaming approaches where promoting gender equality is the main policy goal (agenda setting). More often, gender mainstreaming is used as a means of delivering on or is subsumed under another policy (integration). This uneven implementation suggests that the strategy's effectiveness varies greatly depending on local contexts and priorities.

Organisational Challenges

Benschop and Verloo's research indicates that gender mainstreaming struggles to escape the inherent genderedness of organisations. They found that power differences between parties involved in gender mainstreaming hinder its transformative and innovative potential. Their case study of a project within Human Resource Management in the Ministry of the Flemish Community in Belgium showed that while gender mainstreaming does bring about changes, it does not substantially break down the genderedness of organisations. This suggests that the strategy's failure is partly due to the deeply entrenched nature of gender inequality in organisational structures.

Potential for Transformation

Despite limitations, Walby notes that gender mainstreaming has provided a new basis for feminist solidarity and action at a global level. Rawłuszko's study on Poland shows that gender mainstreaming reforms, even if limited, can serve as a unique entry point for feminists into state institutions. This can lead to an increase in feminist allies within public administrations and legitimise feminist demands on the state. Therefore, while gender mainstreaming may have failed in some respects, it has opened up new avenues for feminist engagement with institutions.

Conceptual and Practical Issues

Eveline and Bacchi's work reveals confusion about what gender mainstreaming actually means and how it should be implemented. They found that different understandings of gender are attached to different reform approaches, which can inhibit the efficacy of the strategy. They suggest viewing gender as a verb (process of gendering) rather than a noun (static category) to increase effectiveness. This indicates that part of gender mainstreaming's failure lies in conceptual ambiguities and practical difficulties in implementation.

Depoliticisation and Delinking from Social Justice

Ravindran and Kelkar-Khambete's study on gender mainstreaming in health attributes its lack of progress to depoliticisation and delinking from social transformation and social justice agendas. They also cite top-down approaches, growing hostility within the global policy environment to justice and equity concerns and increasing privatisation as factors. They suggest framing gender concerns in the language of equity, rights, and justice, and working alongside other movements for social justice to move forward. This indicates that gender mainstreaming's failure is partly due to its disconnection from broader social justice movements and its depoliticisation.

Resistance and Backlash

Lingard notes evidence of backlash against specific policies for girls in Australian schooling, contextualised by the effects of globalisation, masculinity politics, and media representations of a 'gender war'. Ovseiko et al. found regarding the Athena SWAN Charter in the UK that some men feel discriminated against by gender equality initiatives, leading to resistance and concerns about perceived positive discrimination. Brink and Stobbe highlight a "support paradox" where support for women's careers is often seen as unfair, while support for men is taken for granted.

Carey et al. argue that neoliberal agendas adopted by governments have sometimes undermined gender equality architecture. In the Australian context, gender equity architecture has been given no salience by either left-wing or right-wing governments in the ways intended by the 1975 United Nations Conference. Ravindran and Kelkar-Khambete note that the global policy environment has grown increasingly hostile to justice and equity concerns, with privatisation and the retraction of the state's role in health negatively impacting gender mainstreaming efforts in this sector.

Lack of Gender-Sensitive Data and Analysis

Vijayarasa highlights the need for gender-disaggregated data to inform policy decisions, emphasising that leadership decisions about law and policy reform need to be based on data disaggregated by gender, race, and income. Wroblewski shows in Austria that many existing gender equality policies do not force institutions or individuals to challenge traditional practices perceived as merit-based and gender-neutral, leading to a lack of reflexivity in gender equality efforts.

Inadequate Policy Design

Galea et al. found in the Australian construction industry that gender equality initiatives often lack the qualities of robustness and revisability, limiting their capacity to genuinely challenge gendered norms and practices. Policies tend to focus on increasing the numbers of women rather than addressing underlying gender practices and outcomes. Plomien shows in Polish child care policy that a shared family well-being frame can be deployed to implement contrasting models for child care, which can sometimes reconstitute rather than challenge gender hierarchies.

2.3 Policy Recommendations

Based on these learnings from primary research, YWA recommends the following **targeted policy recommendations** to address the identified issues.

2.3.1 Incentive-Based Innovation Platform for Gender Justice

Recommendation:	Develop incentive-based innovation platform to facilitate collaboration between academia, industry, and the public sector on policy solutions.
Objective(s):	Improve policy design mechanisms, support cross-sector collaboration.
Rationale:	Driving systemic change in gender policy by linking equality to economic growth, transforming gender justice into economic dividends, enhanced knowledge transfer and applied research.
Target Area:	Gender policy (design and implementation) in the Australian policy ecosystem.
Timeline for Implementation:	Implementation over 10-year time frame: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Month 0-6: Finalise platform design and establish governance structures● Month 6-12: Launch call for proposals across all tracks● Year 2, Month 0-4: Complete first round of evaluations and announce initial funding recipients● Year 2, Month 4-12: Begin implementation of first wave of projects● Years 3-10: Ongoing cycles of proposal calls, evaluations, and implementations with annual reporting on progress and impact

Evidence Base:

Gender equality has significant economic benefits. The European Institute for Gender Equality's study⁶² on the economic benefits of gender equality in the EU was the first to apply a robust econometric model to evaluate the macroeconomic advantages stemming from gender equality. It considered the financial benefits of equality across areas such as education, labour market activity, and wages. The E3ME model, used for this analysis, is well-established in the EU context and is tailored to assess outcomes at both EU and Member State levels. However, this model has limitations, namely its focus on macroeconomic rather than microeconomic impacts.

The study identified five key pathways through which gender equality can affect the economy: closing gender gaps in tertiary education, labour market activity, and pay, along with demographic changes resulting from these improvements. The research forecasted that increased gender equality would lead to substantial economic benefits, including the creation of millions of jobs and significant GDP growth by 2050. Specific outcomes include:

- **Employment Impact:** By 2050, the implementation of gender equality measures could lead to the creation of between 6.3 million and 10.5 million additional jobs across the EU. Notably, around 70% of these jobs would be occupied by women, highlighting the correlation between reducing gender disparities in the labour market and economic growth.
- **GDP Growth:** Gender equality could result in positive GDP impacts that grow over time. By 2050, GDP per capita could increase by nearly 10% in scenarios where gender equality progresses rapidly, demonstrating the long-term economic gains from closing gender gaps in various sectors.

Sector-Specific Outcomes:

Tertiary Education (Pathway 1): Closing the gender gap in STEM education is projected to increase potential output in several key sectors, including defence, engineering, and computing, thereby producing boosts to productivity and economic growth.

Labour Market Activity (Pathway 2): The study showed that increasing the labour market participation of women would enhance the overall potential output of the economy. In the rapid-progress scenario, reducing the gender gap in labour market activity by up to 20 percentage points by 2030 leads to higher employment and productivity levels.

Gender Pay Gap (Pathway 3): Reducing the gender pay gap is expected to increase household incomes while also influencing employer costs. The research indicates that in the rapid-progress scenario, the gender pay gap could be reduced by up to 14 percentage points by 2030, contributing to more equitable wage distribution and economic stability.

Demographic Impact (Outcome 4): The study suggested that improved gender equality in education, labour market activity, and wages would likely result in higher fertility rates. This demographic change

⁶²European Institute for Gender Equality. *Gender Equality Index 2017: Measuring gender equality in the European Union 2005-2015*. Publications Office of the European Union, 2017.
https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2017.2087_mh0117097enn_pdfweb_20170803130832.pdf.

could have significant economic implications, including increased consumption in the short term and a larger workforce in the long term.

Combined Pathways (Pathway 5): When combining the effects of closing gender gaps in education, labour market activity and pay, along with the demographic impacts, the study found that the overall economic benefits are substantial. The combined effects show a potential for enhanced economic growth, increased employment, and improved competitiveness across the EU, and demonstrates how the pursuit of gender equality can support achievement of economic growth objectives. This has implications in the structuring of any proposed policy recommendation.

The Incentive-Based Innovation Platform for Gender Justice aims to incorporate insights from:

- The European Institute for Gender Equality's (EIGE) study on the economic benefits of gender equality. This study employs the E3ME macroeconomic model to estimate the broad macroeconomic impacts of gender equality, focusing on pathways such as closing gender gaps in education, labour market activity, and wages. By integrating these pathways into the platform, the initiative can better justify and achieve its goals of driving gender equality and generating economic benefits in Australia, and
- Successful models like the Defence Trailblazer,⁶³ established in 2022 as a partnership between the University of Adelaide, UNSW and 50+ industry partners to drive innovation in the defence sector and generate an economic benefit of \$1.5 billion over ten years. Similarly, the recommended platform aims to drive progress in gender equality while generating economic benefits.

Critically, it seeks to incentivise private sector participation in gender equality efforts by recognising the substantial economic dividends that gender parity can deliver. By clearly linking gender equality to economic growth, this policy underscores the importance of allocating funds to initiatives that demonstrate potential for significant impact on key indicators.

Moreover, the platform emphasises the creation of sustainable, long-term partnerships, moving away from current government grant making which involves a one-off, siloed approach to funding, with limited robust monitoring and evaluation. As these innovations are piloted and tested, the proposal envisions the government stepping in to scale up successful initiatives, leveraging proven investments for broad-scale implementation. This approach ensures that once innovations demonstrate their effectiveness, they can be expanded to drive systemic change across Australia. There is potential, too, for sharing and/or licensing these innovations into new markets, namely with allied partners.

Recommendation Details:

Purpose and Objectives

The platform will:

- a) Reward and implement the most effective policy ideas for gender equality
- b) Foster sustainable collaboration between academia, industry, and the public sector

⁶³ <https://dtb.solutions/>

- c) Generate measurable economic benefits through increased workforce participation and productivity
- d) Align with Australia's existing frameworks for gender analysis and impact assessment*
- e) Reduce gender-based violence and its associated economic costs

Structured Programme Tracks

The platform will introduce four distinct tracks, each addressing key aspects of gender equality:

1. Gender-Equal Workforce Innovation (GEWI)

Focus: Initiatives to close the gender pay gap and increase women's representation in leadership

Example projects:

- AI-driven bias detection tools for recruitment and promotion processes
- Innovative job-sharing platforms for senior leadership positions

This track directly addresses the labour market activity and gender pay gap pathways identified in the EIGE study, aiming to replicate the projected 14 percentage point reduction in the gender pay gap by 2030.

2. Education and Training Pathways (ETP)

Focus: Programmes to address skills gaps and prepare a gender-diverse workforce

Example projects:

- Virtual reality-based STEM education programmes for rural and remote girls
- Industry-partnered apprenticeship programmes targeting women in male-dominated trades

This track aligns with the tertiary education pathway, particularly focusing on closing the gender gap in STEM fields, which the EIGE study identified as crucial for boosting productivity and economic growth.

3. Health and Wellbeing Accelerator (HWA)

Focus: Innovations in women's health and access to healthcare

Example projects:

- AI-powered mobile app for early detection of postpartum depression
- Workplace redesign solutions to support women experiencing menopause

While not directly addressed in the EIGE study, this track recognizes the interconnection between health, workforce participation, and productivity.

4. Violence Prevention and Response (VPR)

Focus: Innovative approaches to prevent gender-based violence and support survivors

Example projects:

- AI-powered mobile app to collect and collate data on reported and unreported violence in public spaces
- Networked solutions to enable better integration of peer workers (those with lived experience) in care interventions and treatment models for victim-survivors

This track addresses the significant economic costs associated with gender-based violence, which, while not explicitly quantified in the EIGE study, is recognized as a major barrier to gender equality and economic participation.

Assessment Criteria and Evaluation Process:

Establish clear, measurable criteria for evaluating proposals:

- **Measurability:** Quantifiable impact on specific gender equality indicators (e.g., 5% reduction in gender pay gap within target industry, 10% reduction in reported domestic violence incidents)
- **Scalability:** Potential to reach at least 100,000 women or 1,000 organisations within 5 years
- **Alignment:** Direct contribution to at least one goal in Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality
- **Partnership strength:** Involvement of at least two sectors with clearly defined roles and contributions
- **Economic impact:** Projected contribution to GDP growth and job creation, in line with EIGE study projections

Evaluation:

- Initial screening by platform administrators for eligibility and completeness
- Detailed assessment by a panel of 16 experts (4 each from academia, industry, public sector, and NGOs specialising in gender issues)
- Final selection involving input from key stakeholders and potential end-users

Enhanced Collaboration Model:

- Require proposals to demonstrate partnerships between at least two sectors (academia, industry, public sector, or NGOs)
- Establish a mentor network of 75 industry leaders, gender equality experts, and violence prevention specialists to support project teams
- Facilitate quarterly forums and monthly online workshops to encourage knowledge sharing and formal and informal collaboration between projects
- Create a secure online platform for real-time collaboration and data sharing among project teams

Economic Value Creation Framework:

Set specific, measurable goals for economic impact, informed by the EIGE study's projections:

- Target AUD \$2 billion in economic benefit over 10 years through increased workforce participation and productivity gains
- Aim to create 1,000 new jobs in gender equality-focused initiatives
- Develop 100 new 'products' or implementable solutions addressing gender inequality
- Reduce the economic cost of gender-based violence by 20% over 10 years
- Increase women's labour market participation rate by 5 percentage points over 5 years

Implementation Pathway:

- Introduce a 'Gender Solution Readiness Level' (GSRL) framework with 9 levels, from basic research (1) to full-scale implementation (9)
- Create pathways for successful innovations to be adopted by at least 10 government agencies and 30 major private sector organisations
- Establish a 'Fast Track' process for high-potential violence prevention initiatives to accelerate their development and implementation

Funding and Incentive Structure:

- Allocate AUD \$100 million over 5 years to support winning proposals
- Offer tiered funding based on GSRL progression: Concept stage (GSRL 1-3): Up to AUD \$150,000 Pilot stage (GSRL 4-6): Up to AUD \$750,000 Scale-up stage (GSRL 7-9): Up to AUD \$3 million
- Provide additional funding of AUD \$25 million specifically for violence prevention initiatives
- Offer non-financial incentives including mentorship, networking opportunities, and public recognition through an annual 'Gender Innovation Awards' ceremony
- Introduce a 'Gender Equality Innovation Tax Credit' for private sector organisations implementing successful initiatives

Monitoring and Evaluation:

- Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation framework based on the Australian Government Guide to Policy Impact Analysis and the methodologies used in the EIGE study
- Conduct bi-annual reviews of the platform's impact on gender equality indicators and economic benefits
- Engage an independent body (e.g., Productivity Commission) to perform a comprehensive evaluation every two years
- Establish a real-time data dashboard to track progress across all initiatives
- Conduct longitudinal studies to assess long-term impacts of implemented solutions

Government Role:

- Position government as a facilitator of innovation and potential end-user of successful solutions
- Establish an inter-departmental working group with representatives from 15 key departments to explore integration of successful innovations into policy and public sector operations
- Use government procurement policies to support scaling of effective solutions, with a target of integrating at least 8 innovations per year into government operations
- Create a ‘Gender Equality Innovation Regulatory Sandbox’ to allow testing of innovative solutions in a controlled regulatory environment

Timeline and Key Milestones:

- Month 0-6: Finalise platform design and establish governance structures
- Month 6-12: Launch call for proposals across all tracks
- Year 2, Month 0-4: Complete first round of evaluations and announce initial funding recipients
- Year 2, Month 4-12: Begin implementation of first wave of projects
- Years 3-10: Ongoing cycles of proposal calls, evaluations, and implementations with annual reporting on progress and impact

The Incentive-Based Innovation Platform for Gender Justice represents a strategic, evidence-based approach to advancing gender equality while driving economic growth in Australia. By focusing on key pathways identified in the EIGE study, incorporating a crucial focus on violence prevention, and fostering cross-sector collaboration, this platform has the potential to generate substantial social and economic benefits.

The platform’s structure, with its focus on workforce innovation, education, health, and violence prevention, comprehensively addresses the pathways through which gender equality affects the economy. By closing gender gaps in education, increasing labour market participation, reducing the gender pay gap, and addressing the economic costs of gender-based violence, the platform aims to replicate and exceed the positive economic outcomes observed in the EU context.

The platform's emphasis on measurable outcomes, scalability, and cross-sector collaboration ensures that it can adapt to the Australian context while maintaining a focus on economic impact. The rigorous evaluation process and economic value creation framework will allow for ongoing assessment and refinement of the platform’s effectiveness.

Further scoping is recommended, especially of the mechanism for economic goal setting and measurement, followed by implementation of this platform to position Australia as a global leader in gender equality and inclusive economic growth.

*All proposals will align with the Australian Government’s commitment to gender-responsive budgeting, as outlined in the APS Guide to Gender Analysis and Gender Impact Assessment and the NFAW’s analysis of the 2024-25 Budget. This alignment will ensure that gender equality initiatives are integrated into broader economic and social policies, enhancing their effectiveness and sustainability. Utilising the Australian Government Guide to Policy Impact Analysis, thorough evaluations of all proposals will be

conducted to ensure they offer the greatest net benefit for Australia. Robust evaluation will ensure that the most effective and efficient gender equality initiatives are selected and implemented, maximising their impact.

2.3.2 Enhancing the AANA Code of Ethics Regarding Gender Representation in Advertising

Recommendation:	Reissue existing AANA Code of Ethics to align to contemporary societal expectations and improve gender representation in advertising.
Objective(s):	Reduce prevalence of harmful gender norms in Australian advertising.
Target Area:	Australian media industry, with a focus on its influence of social norms; mitigation of gender bias and stereotyping, dismantling of harmful beliefs in young people.
Rationale:	The Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) Code of Ethics serves as a framework to ensure that advertisements are legal, honest, and prepared with fairness and responsibility. However, the Code’s current language and scope may be insufficient in explicitly addressing and mitigating the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and harmful norms. Enhancements to the Code are proposed to more effectively align with contemporary societal expectations and promote equitable representation in advertising. Recent analyses, including one of over 10, 000 globally run ads, have shown that gender stereotypical advertising has become more prevalent not less. ⁶⁴
Timeline for Implementation:	12 months.

Recommendation Details:

1. Explicit Addressing of Sexism

While the code tackles gender discrimination and stereotypes, it does not explicitly mention “sexism” or outline its various manifestations in advertising. Including explicit references to sexism and clarifying how it can be manifested in advertising would provide clearer guidelines for advertisers and strengthen the code’s ability to combat gender-based discrimination.

2. Subtlety and Nuance in Gender Stereotyping

The current provisions address overt gender stereotypes but do not fully capture more subtle and nuanced forms of stereotyping that can be just as harmful. For example, advertisements may subtly imply that certain behaviours or roles are expected or more natural for one gender than the other without explicitly stating so. Clarifying and expanding the guidelines to cover these subtler forms would enhance the code’s effectiveness.

⁶⁴ CreativeX. (2023). *Gender in advertising report 2023*. CreativeX. <https://www.creativex.com/reports/gender-in-advertising-report-2023>

3. Intersectionality

The code could benefit from a more explicit consideration of intersectionality—how different aspects of a person's identity (e.g., race, age, sexuality) intersect with gender. Advertisements may portray women in diverse roles but still fail to represent or even stereotype women from various backgrounds. Guidelines that encourage advertisers to consider multiple aspects of diversity can help ensure more comprehensive and respectful representation.

4. Portrayal of Violence Against Women

While the code mentions that advertising should not suggest that all men are violent towards women or that men cannot be victims of domestic violence, it does not explicitly address how to handle advertisements that might indirectly glorify or trivialise violence against women through jokes, suggestive imagery, or subtle cues. Expanding guidelines on portraying violence, especially sexual violence, would be crucial.

5. Impact of Advertising on Societal Norms

The code could further emphasise the role of advertising in shaping societal norms and attitudes towards gender. Advertising not only reflects but can also influence societal beliefs and behaviours. Strengthening provisions that require advertisers to consider the potential social impact of their advertisements could lead to more responsible communications.

6. Monitoring and Enforcement

Enhanced monitoring and enforcement mechanisms could ensure that the provisions regarding gender are not only well-crafted but also effectively implemented. This could include regular reviews of advertising practices and more detailed reporting on complaints and actions taken, particularly those related to gender discrimination and stereotypes.

By addressing these areas, the AANA Code of Ethics could provide more robust protections against gender discrimination and more effectively contribute to the reduction of sexism and violence against women in media and advertising contexts, which evidence shows impacts individual attitudes and behaviours, harming women in real life.^{65 66}

2.3.3 Enhancing the AANA Children's Advertising Code Regarding Gender Representation in Advertising

Recommendation:	Enhance existing AANA Children's Advertising Code to improve gender representation in advertising targeted toward children.
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⁶⁵ Pike, J. J., & Jennings, N. A. (2020). Media and the development of gender role stereotypes. *Annual Review of Developmental Psychology*, 2, 275-298. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-devpsych-051120-010630>

⁶⁶ Sulpizio, F., Rollero, C., Tartaglia, S., & Taddei, T. (2023). Gender and media representations: A review of the literature on gender stereotypes, objectification and sexualization. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, Article 10218532. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.10218532>

Objective(s):	Reduce prevalence of harmful gender norms in Australian advertising; enhance representation and diversity in Australian advertising.
Target Area:	Reduction of gender-based consumer manipulation, reduction of long-term stereotyping and gender roles.
Rationale:	The Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) Children's Advertising Code requires enhancements given the ongoing issues with gender stereotypes in children's advertising. Research in the US and Europe has shown that as of March 2022, ⁶⁷ “Toys marketed to girls were 18 times more likely to be shown demonstrating nurturing or domestic skills than toys marketed to boys.” Additionally, “Most toys still have clearly gendered associations, with dolls being targeted toward girls and cars, sporting equipment and toy weapons targeted toward boys, and only around 23% falling into the gender-neutral category.”
Timeline for Implementation:	12 months.

Recommendation Details:

1. Explicit Prohibition of Gender Stereotyping

- The code does not specifically address the reinforcement of gender stereotypes in children's advertising.
- Introduce specific clauses that explicitly prohibit advertising that:
 - Depicts activities, roles, or toys as inherently suitable for only one gender.
 - Portrays one gender engaging predominantly in certain types of play (e.g., girls with dolls, boys with action figures).
 - Uses language, music, or imagery that reinforces traditional gender roles.
 - These guidelines should be accompanied by examples to clarify what constitutes inappropriate gender stereotyping.

2. Enhanced Representation and Diversity

- There is currently no requirement in the code to ensure diverse and inclusive representation in advertisements targeting children.
- Mandate that advertisements include diverse representations of children, encompassing various genders, races, and abilities. Guidelines should ensure that:
 - Advertisements portray all children in empowering roles, regardless of gender.

⁶⁷ Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media. (2022). *Equal play? Analyzing gender stereotypes, diversity, and inclusion in advertising and marketing of toys*. Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media. <https://geenadavisinstitute.org/research/equal-play-analyzing-gender-stereotypes-diversity-and-inclusion-in-advertising-and-marketing-for-the-most-popular-toys-of-2022/>

- No child is shown as inferior, less capable, or less valuable because of their gender or other identity attributes.
- Advertisements should strive to reflect the diversity of the child audience in Australia, promoting inclusivity and respect for all.

3. Regulations on Marketing Gender-Specific Toys

- The code lacks specific rules regarding the marketing of traditionally gendered toys.
- Introduce regulations that:
 - Discourage marketers from explicitly or implicitly targeting toys based on gender.
 - Encourage the portrayal of toys in a gender-neutral manner, showing children of all genders playing with all types of toys.
 - Prohibit marketing messages that suggest certain toys are only suitable for children of a specific gender.
 - This approach aligns with trends in some regions (like California’s law on gender-neutral toy sections) and could be a progressive step for Australia.

These changes would support the development of healthier gender perceptions among Australian children. Studies have found that by preschool age—around 3–5 years old—most children view domestic labour as a woman’s responsibility and believe this is ‘normal and fair.’⁶⁸ As toys and toy advertising play an important role in children’s gender socialisation it is imperative to ensure they do not perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes.

2.3.4 Adding Gender Stereotype Assessment to Screen Australia’s Evaluation

Recommendation:	Add two indicators to Screen Australia’s project evaluation process.
Objective(s):	Reduce perpetuation of gender norms in Australian film and television.
Target Area:	Address systemic underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, inspire young women as to what they can achieve, encourage the production of content which subverts traditional gender roles.
Rationale:	Screen Australia’s Gender Matters initiative primarily targets the quantitative representation of women in key creative roles and as protagonists. The 2022/23 report focuses on data concerning the number of women in roles such as writers, producers, and directors, as well as their presence as lead characters in funded projects. However, it does not explore how women are portrayed within these projects, particularly in relation to gender stereotypes. This omission is significant because the quality and depth of female representation are crucial to challenging and changing entrenched societal views. By neglecting qualitative aspects like character development, narrative choices, and efforts to subvert traditional gender roles, the report risks overlooking the broader impact of these

⁶⁸ Li, Y., Wang, M., & Liberman, Z. (2023). Preschoolers perceive and normalise household labour inequality. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 120(29), Article e2301781120. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2301781120>

	portrayals. Achieving gender parity in numbers is essential, but without considering how women are depicted, the industry may fail to address deeper issues of gender bias and inequality in storytelling.
Timeline for Implementation:	12 months.

Recommendation Details:

New Indicators: Gender Stereotype Challenge Presence & Score

- Assess whether and how effectively the project challenges or subverts gender stereotypes
- Score on a scale of 1-10 (1 = reinforces stereotypes, 5 = neutral, 10 = strongly challenges stereotypes)

Implementation:

1. Add the new indicator to existing project evaluation methods
2. Brief current assessors on how to evaluate this aspect of projects
3. Include the new indicator results in the annual Gender Matters report

Prioritisation:

Give preference to projects that score highly on this new indicator, alongside existing criteria.

Expected Outcome:

Incentivise and increase the number of screen projects that present more diverse and complex portrayals of women, going beyond numerical representation to improve the quality of female representation in Australian screen content, and to enhance the role of media in supporting women’s equality, rather than reinforcing their inferiority.

2.3.5 Social Media Regulation for Online Safety and Gender Justice in Australia

Recommendation:	Enact legislation to increase regulation of social media platforms; establish a regulatory body to enforce content moderation practices.
Objective(s):	Reduce exposure to harmful content on social and digital media platforms; improve platform moderation policies; increase enforcement of moderation policies; improve platform transparency.
Target Area:	Reducing the prevalence and normalisation of harmful content on social media, particularly to the extent they influence social norms.

Rationale:	Moderation of harmful, discriminatory content; aimed at creating a safer and more equitable online environment, particularly for women and marginalised genders, ensures less danger associated with social media usage.
Timeline for Implementation:	24 months.

Status Quo:

In recent years, the pervasive influence of social media platforms has raised significant concerns about the spread of harmful content that fosters gender-based violence, harassment, and misogyny. Evidence suggests that platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram contribute to these issues through algorithms that inadvertently amplify harmful content.⁶⁹

The Imperative for Robust Content Moderation

The transformation of Reddit from a platform notorious for hosting toxic content into a reputable, publicly traded company demonstrates the impact of rigorous content moderation. By implementing comprehensive moderation practices, platforms can significantly reduce harmful behaviours and improve user experience. This policy advocates for mandatory content moderation frameworks that are regularly updated to address new and emerging threats, ensuring that platforms remain safe and inclusive spaces.

Community-Driven Moderation: A Proven Strategy

Empowering community members to take an active role in content moderation has proven effective in maintaining the integrity of online spaces. Reddit’s success in reducing platform toxicity was largely due to its reliance on volunteer moderators who were equipped with the tools and autonomy to enforce community standards. This policy recommends the establishment of independent moderation councils comprising diverse community representatives, including women and non-binary individuals, to oversee and advise on moderation practices. These councils should be empowered to make decisions that reflect the needs and safety of all users.

Addressing Toxic Communities: A Targeted Approach

Research indicates that dismantling entire toxic communities is more effective than simply moderating individual posts. Online spaces that promote gender-based violence, harassment, or misogyny contribute significantly to the overall harm experienced by users. This policy calls for the identification and systematic dismantling of such communities on social media platforms. Holding platforms accountable for the persistence of these spaces is essential, and penalties should be imposed for non-compliance.

⁶⁹ Hern, A. (2024). We unleashed Facebook and Instagram’s algorithms on blank accounts: They served up sexism and misogyny. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/article/2024/jul/21/we-unleashed-facebook-and-instagram-algorithms-on-blank-accounts-they-served-up-sexism-and-misogyny>

Focusing on Harmful Behaviour Over Neutrality

Neutrality in content moderation can obscure the need for decisive action against harmful behaviours. Platforms that attempt to balance political perspectives risk penalising marginalised groups, undermining the safety of vulnerable users. This policy emphasises the need for moderation practices that prioritise the removal of harmful behaviours, particularly those that perpetuate gender-based violence. By focusing on user safety rather than perceived neutrality, platforms can better serve the interests of all users, especially those at higher risk of online abuse.

Transparency and Accountability in Moderation

Ensuring transparency and accountability in content moderation is crucial for maintaining public trust in social media platforms. This policy recommends regular audits of moderation practices and the publication of detailed reports on the types of content removed, the reasons behind these actions, and the demographics of affected users. Such transparency will allow for greater scrutiny of platform practices and ensure that moderation efforts are both effective and fair.

Implementation Strategy:

To enforce these content moderation guidelines, this policy proposes the enactment of legislation that mandates compliance from all social media platforms operating in Australia. A regulatory body should be established to oversee the implementation of these regulations, conduct audits, and ensure accountability. Additionally, collaboration between platforms, government agencies, and civil society organisations will be essential in developing best practices for content moderation and online safety.

FAMILY/ FRIENDS

3.1 The Situation

What does existing research say about young people's, particularly young women's experiences?

Family and friends shape the life outcomes of young Australian women, especially in the face of gendered disadvantages. The economic challenges and educational achievements of these young women are influenced by their family backgrounds, which affect their career prospects and economic stability.



3.1.1 Educational Attainment and Career Opportunities

Disadvantaged (low socioeconomic status [SES]) girls start behind their more advantaged peers in school, leading to long-term educational and career disparities. Girls from low SES backgrounds score lower in reading, writing, and numeracy tests than those from wealthier backgrounds. In Year 3 reading, the gap between girls from low and high socio-economic backgrounds was 91.8 points nationwide.⁷⁰ This educational gap extends through to Year 12, where the attainment gap is 19.3% between young women from low and high socio-economic backgrounds.⁷¹ Post-school engagement statistics reveal that only 53.6% of young women aged 17-24 from the most disadvantaged areas are fully engaged in work and/or study, compared to 82.1% in the most advantaged areas.⁷² These disparities perpetuate cycles of disadvantage, limiting economic mobility and career advancement.

3.1.2 Social and Emotional Support

Supportive family and friends can mitigate the effects of gendered disadvantage by providing essential emotional and social support. Close family members are usually primary sources of emotional support for young women.⁷³ This support is crucial for mental health and well-being, helping young women navigate challenges such as relationship breakdowns, loneliness, and stress. However, the quality and availability of this support can vary, significantly impacting young women's ability to cope with life's pressures.

3.1.3 Impact of Motherhood

Young mothers rely heavily on family and friends for support. They frequently face stigma and judgement, which can be alleviated by strong social networks.⁷⁴ Support from family and friends provides practical help with childcare, emotional support, and guidance, enabling young mothers to continue their education or pursue employment. However, a lack of support can exacerbate feelings of isolation and hinder the achievement of personal and professional goals.

3.1.4 Health and Wellbeing

Health and well-being are closely linked to social networks. Research underscores the systemic nature of gendered disadvantage, which manifests in poorer health outcomes for women.⁷⁵ Supportive relationships can buffer against these negative health impacts by providing emotional support, encouraging healthy

⁷⁰ “New Report: Disadvantaged Australian Girls ‘Starting behind and Staying Behind’ in School and Careers.” 2019. The Smith Family. 2019. <https://www.thsmithfamily.com.au/media/centre/releases/2013/191113-disadvantaged-australian-girls-starting-behind-and-staying-behind-in-school-and-careers>.

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ Relationships Australia. (2022). *Relationship indicators 2022: Full report*. Relationships Australia. <https://www.relationships.org.au/relationship-indicators/full-report/>

⁷⁴ “Experiences and Aspirations of Younger Mothers. 2010. https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/06_2012/experiences_aspirations_of_younger_mothers_may2012.pdf.

⁷⁵ Teede, Helena. 2023. “How Are Australian Women Scoring on Health, Wealth and Wellbeing?” Monash Lens. October 28, 2023. <https://lens.monash.edu/@politics-society/2023/10/28/1386258/how-are-australian-women-scoring-on-health-wealth-and-wellbeing>.

behaviours, and facilitating access to healthcare. Conversely, the absence of supportive relationships can lead to higher levels of psychological distress and poorer health outcomes.

3.1.5 Household Responsibilities

Gender roles within families also contribute to inequality. Over a third of young women reported that male siblings seldom or never contributed equally to household chores.⁷⁶ This unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities can limit young women's time and energy for educational and career pursuits and enforce gender roles from a young age.

3.1.6 Navigating Gendered Disadvantage

Family and friends are critical in helping young women navigate systemic gendered disadvantage. This includes providing advice, sharing experiences, and advocating for them in various settings. Families can influence young women's perceptions of gender roles and expectations, either reinforcing traditional norms or challenging them. Friends can offer support in confronting discriminatory practices in educational or workplace settings.

3.2 Primary Research

What does YWA research, including our survey, interviews, literature reviews, and expert consultations, say about young people's, particularly young women's experience?

3.2.1 Survey Findings

The survey reveals notable differences in how men and women perceive their parents' treatment of each other and the egalitarian nature of their relationships. Men generally report that their parents treat each other better and have a more gender-equal relationship compared to the assessments women provide.

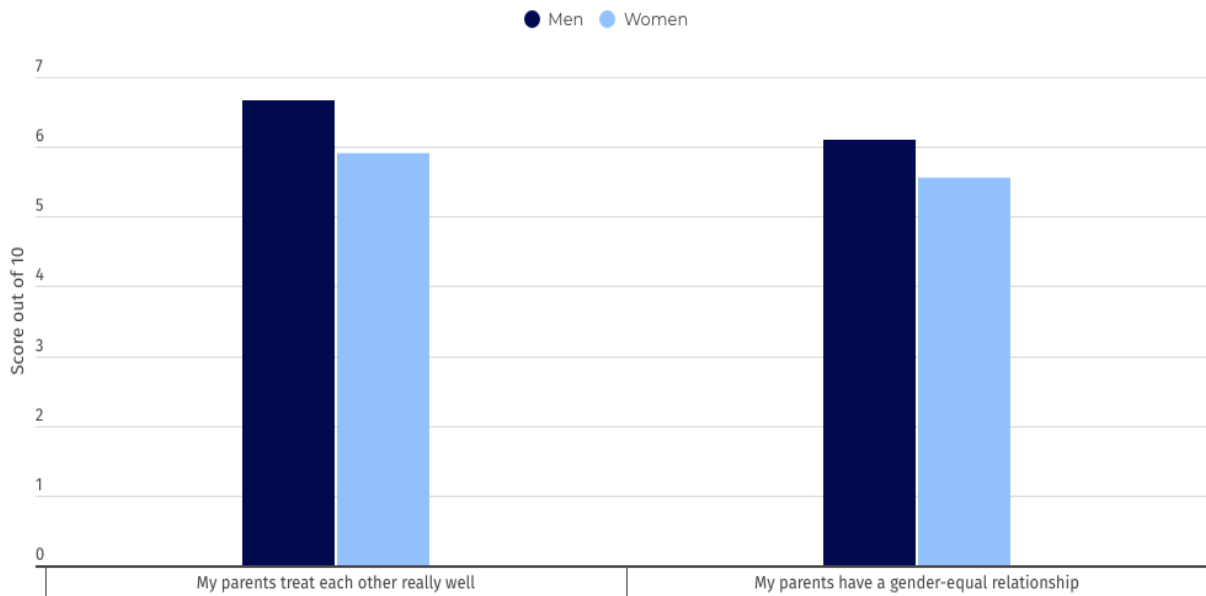
These differences in perception could be due to several factors. Men might be more likely to observe and internalise positive, egalitarian relationship modelling from their parents. This could reflect actual differences in parental dynamics, where men experience more balanced relationships. Alternatively, it could indicate that men are less aware of gendered dynamics and interpersonal power structures, leading to a more optimistic assessment of their parents' relationships.

⁷⁶ Hunt, Elle. 2016. "Gender Inequality Is a Problem, Say 69% of Young Australian Women." The Guardian. The Guardian. October 10, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/11/gender-inequality-is-a-problem-say-69-of-young-australian-women>.

Table 4: Friends/Family by Gender

Friends/Family by Gender Variable	Gender Identity		
	Overall	Men	Women
My parents treat each other really well	6.12 (7.00)	6.67 (7.00)	5.91 (6.00)
My parents have a gender-equal relationship	5.71 (6.00)	6.10 (6.00)	5.56 (5.00)

Figure 4: Friends/Family by Gender



3.2.2 Interview Insights

Young women expressed navigating complex family dynamics and friendships shaped by gender expectations and societal norms. Within families, many experience stricter parental control than their male siblings. One woman observed, “My parents didn't want me drinking, but they don't care if my brothers have a bottle of vodka in the fridge.” This double standard is indicative of the societal belief that women need to be protected, while men are given freedom.

Young women also have their pain and experiences dismissed in family settings. This invalidation, coupled with instances of emotional, physical, and domestic abuse, contributes to ongoing trauma and stress, making it difficult to maintain healthy relationships in both personal and professional contexts.

The unequal distribution of household responsibilities furthers these challenges. As one participant noted, “Women do far more caretaking than men even if they have full-time jobs. There is a lack of equal distribution of housework.”

Despite these challenges, young women find solace in female friendships. The concept of “sisterhood” is highly valued, with one woman including it among her ‘five words’ to describe her experience: “beauty standards, constrained, violent, objectification, and sisterhood.” These friendships offer emotional support and depth that many find lacking in male friendships. However, young women still struggle with maintaining friendships and navigating social circles, especially during transitions from school to adulthood.

In contrast, male friendships are perceived as surface level. One woman observed, “Men do not have friends. They do not have quality relationships.” This stems from the belief that men's friendships operate with less emotional openness and vulnerability, resulting in poor emotional regulation among young men.

Cross-gender friendships present additional challenges. Many women express frustration with male friends who misinterpret their platonic intentions as romantic interest. One woman shared, “They'll express interest in me or flirt with me, but no, we're friends. I have nothing to give you.” This dynamic can lead to feelings of objectification and disappointment, especially when long-standing friendships are revealed to have underlying romantic motivations.

These interrelated issues in family and social spheres contribute to ongoing stress and difficulties in forming and maintaining healthy relationships. Addressing the disproportionate burdens on young women is crucial, as is creating spaces for genuine connections and support.

3.3 Policy Recommendations

Based on these learnings from primary research, YWA recommends the following **targeted policy recommendations** to address the identified issues.

3.3.1 Life Course Credit System

Recommendation:	Life Course Credit System
Objective(s):	To provide flexibility and support throughout various life stages and transitions, particularly benefiting women who face career interruptions and challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities.
Target Area:	Reduce gender disparities in career progression, support financial independence and provide a more equitable distribution of care work.

Rationale:	<p>This system provides a framework for accumulating and utilising credits for education, parental leave, career transitions, and caregiving, acknowledging the nonlinear nature of modern careers. It supports gender equity by assisting women through key life transitions, reducing financial stress, and boosting workforce participation. By facilitating skill acquisition, career development, and equitable caregiving responsibilities, it aims to narrow the gender pay gap, increase women's representation in leadership, and ensure financial independence.</p> <p>Integration with existing social security and tax frameworks ensures seamless implementation and accessibility. Encouraging employer participation and offering additional benefits further enhances its effectiveness, making it a comprehensive solution to the multifaceted challenges faced by young women. This approach tackles the root causes of gender disparities in career progression and financial independence, fostering a more resilient workforce and contributing to a more equitable society</p>
Timeline for Implementation:	36 months

Recommendation Details:

The Life Course Flexibility Credit System allows for credit accumulation through work, volunteering, and caregiving. These credits can then be used for education, parental leave, career transitions, and caregiving. This system is designed to increase participation in education and skill development, promote a more equitable distribution of caregiving responsibilities, and provide greater support for career transitions and entrepreneurship. By providing a flexible support system, this policy aims to reduce gender disparities in career progression and financial independence, acknowledging the nonlinear nature of modern careers and life paths.

The key features of the system include:

1. Credit Accumulation: Credits can be accumulated through various activities, including employment (1 credit per month of full-time work, pro-rata for part-time), volunteer work (1 credit per 40 hours of registered volunteer activity), community service (1 credit per 30 hours of approved community service), and caregiving (1 credit per month of full-time unpaid caregiving for children under 5, elderly parents, or disabled family members).

Credit Categories and Usage:

- Education Credits: Can be used for tuition fees, living expenses during study, or online courses. No age limit for usage.
- Parental Credits: Provide income support during parental leave or when reducing work hours for childcare. It can be used flexibly, including for part-time work arrangements.

- Career Transition Credits: Support periods of reduced income when changing careers or starting a business. They can be used for skills training, certifications, or as seed funding for start-ups.
- Caregiving Credits: Offer support when taking time off to care for elderly parents or sick family members. They can be used for respite care services or income replacement.

2. Implementation: The system will be supported by a government-backed digital platform for credit tracking and redemption, integrated with existing social security and tax systems. Annual statements will be provided to all citizens showing credit balance and usage options. Financial institutions will be encouraged to recognise credits in loan applications, enhancing financial inclusion.

3. Additional Benefits: Employers can offer additional credits as part of employee benefits packages, and credits can be partially transferred between spouses or domestic partners. Unused credits can be converted to superannuation contributions at retirement age.

4. Funding: The system will be funded through a combination of government allocation, a small payroll levy, and corporate partnerships, with tax incentives for businesses that actively support employees' use of the credit system.

3.3.2 Parents' Guidebook

Recommendation:	Publish Guidebook on gender equality in the context of raising children for new parents.
Objective(s):	To empower parents to raise children who are resilient, respectful, and free from constraining gender norms while also addressing societal and systemic disadvantages.
Target Area:	Supporting healthy psychosocial development.
Rationale:	The Parental Guidebook tackles systemic challenges faced by young women and their families, by addressing the root causes of these issues. This guidebook promotes gender equality by encouraging gender-neutral parenting and challenging stereotypes. It builds resilience in children through problem-solving techniques and a growth mindset. Financial literacy sections help families manage economic challenges, while health and well-being content fosters holistic development.
Timeline for Implementation:	6 months

Status Quo:

Early childhood experiences are crucial in shaping future success, yet parents often struggle in knowing how to support their children's development in the face of socioeconomic pressures and entrenched gender norms. This is particularly challenging for daughters, who frequently face additional disadvantages and barriers. There is a need for comprehensive guidance to help parents navigate these issues, foster resilience, and challenge traditional gender norms.

Recommendation Details:

The guidebook will cover crucial areas, including understanding systemic disadvantage, promoting gender equality, fostering resilience, financial literacy, nurturing healthy relationships, education and career planning, health and well-being, cultural competence, technology and digital literacy, community engagement, and self-care for parents.

Key Sections of the Guidebook:

Understanding Systemic Disadvantage: This section will provide an overview of socioeconomic factors affecting child outcomes, the impacts of generational poverty, gender disparities in education and career opportunities, and racial and ethnic inequalities in Australia.

Promoting Gender Equality: Strategies for challenging gender stereotypes in daily life, gender-neutral parenting practices, encouraging diverse interests and skills, and the importance of diverse role models for children will be discussed.

Fostering Resilience and Perseverance: Age-appropriate activities to build problem-solving skills, techniques for promoting a growth mindset, strategies for teaching children to cope with failure and setbacks, and the importance of allowing children to take calculated risks will be included.

Financial Literacy for Families: This section will offer age-appropriate ways to teach children about money, strategies for saving and budgeting, information on government support programs, and guidance on discussing financial matters openly.

Nurturing Healthy Relationships: Tips for building strong parent-child bonds, effective communication strategies, teaching children about consent and respect, and recognising and addressing signs of domestic violence will be provided.

Education and Career Planning: An overview of the Australian education system, vocational and higher education pathways, supporting children's educational journey, and exploring diverse career options will be covered.

Health and Well-being: Information on child and adolescent mental health, strategies for promoting physical health and nutrition, discussions about body image and self-esteem, and resources for accessing health services will be included.

Cultural Competence and Inclusivity: Strategies for teaching children about diversity and inclusion, information on Australia's multicultural society and Indigenous cultures, preventing discrimination and bias, and fostering cross-cultural friendships will be provided.

Technology and Digital Literacy: Guidelines for technology use, ensuring online safety, necessary digital skills for future careers, and balancing screen time will be discussed.

Community Engagement and Support: Information on local community resources, strategies for involvement in school and community activities, building support networks, and advocating for systemic change will be included.

Self-care for Parents: Strategies for maintaining work-life balance, parental mental health support, managing stress, and maintaining individual identity while parenting will be provided.

Implementation:

The guidebook will be accessibly written, include diverse family representations, and provide practical, actionable advice. It will be available in multiple formats (print, digital, audio) and languages to ensure wide accessibility.



EDUCATION

4.1 The Situation

What does existing research say about young people's, particularly young women's experiences?

Education, the foundation for personal development, career prospects, and social mobility, is crucial in shaping the lives of young Australian women. However, young women’s educational opportunities are impeded by interconnected issues such as declining confidence, high rates of sexual abuse, significant mental health challenges, gendered career perceptions, and the omnipresence of social media. When young women have adverse educational experiences, it triggers a cycle of disadvantage that can extend into adulthood, perpetuating inequalities and limiting their potential. Conversely, high-quality, gender-nuanced education can minimise many gendered disadvantages, including economic insecurity, financial precariousness, gender-based violence, poor health, and low self-esteem. To craft effective policy interventions, it is essential to develop a comprehensive understanding of the intersections between gender and education.

**Note: This chapter examines experiences during school-attending years, whether they occur within the school setting or elsewhere. This approach is grounded in sociological theory, which posits that school and other life contexts are especially interrelated during this critical developmental period.*

4.1.1 Confidence and Self-Perception Decline

The confidence and well-being of girls in Australia decline notably during high school. When girls start high school, 75% believe they will “have every opportunity” to become leaders. However, by the time they graduate, this confidence drops to 57%, with 40% identifying gender as the primary obstacle. At age 10, 56% of girls consider themselves confident, but this number drops to 44% by age 17. Upon leaving high school, only 59% of girls are happy with their lives compared to 68% of boys. Additionally only 60% of girls feel optimistic about their future compared to 67% of boys.⁷⁷ This decline in confidence and well-being indicates systemic issues within the educational environment that disproportionately affect girls, potentially setting them up for long-term disadvantage.

4.1.2 Early Exposure to Sexual Abuse

In Australia, 1 in 6 women (16%) have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse before the age of 15;⁷⁸ with 3 in 5 (59%) recorded sexual assault victims in 2022 being under 18 at the time of their incident.⁷⁹ Additionally, around 2 in 5 (40%) respondents who had ever experienced sex had also experienced unwanted sex over their lifetime. These experiences were more common among respondents that were:

- trans and non-binary young people (55%) and young women (45%) than young men (21%),
- LGBTQ+ young people (48%) than heterosexual young people (34%).⁸⁰

⁷⁷ “The Dream Gap: Australian Girls’ Views on Gender Equality.” 2017. <https://www.agec.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/The-Dream-Gap-Australian-Girls-Views-on-Gender-Equality-2017.pdf>.

⁷⁸ “Australia’s Children, Children Exposed to Family Violence.” 2022. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. February 25, 2022. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-children/contents/justice-safety/children-family-violence>.

⁷⁹ “Children and Young People.” 2024. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. July 19, 2024. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/children-and-young-people>.

⁸⁰ “Children and Young People.” 2024. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. July 19, 2024. [https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/children-and-young-people#:~:text=About%20in%20\(40,than%20young%20men%20\(21%25\)](https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/children-and-young-people#:~:text=About%20in%20(40,than%20young%20men%20(21%25)).

The average age at which unwanted sex was first experienced was 14.9 years, and was lower for respondents that were trans and non-binary young (14.0 years) compared with young women (15.0 years) and men (15.4 years). About 1 in 5 (21%) were younger than 14 years of age.⁸¹ Further, a 2016 report found that child-on-child sexual assaults nearly doubled in NSW, from 44 in 2006 to 80 in 2015.⁸² These early experiences of violence can shape persistent beliefs and norms, leading to recurring patterns of violence and contributing to ongoing psychosocial challenges.

4.1.3 Gendered Mental Health Struggles

Females aged 16–34 were more likely to experience psychological distress than any other sex or age group (26%, compared with 14% of males aged 16–34).⁸³ A significantly higher proportion of males (66%) reported feeling happy or very happy with their life as a whole compared to females (54%).⁸⁴ Nearly 25% of young people aged 15-19 meet the criteria for a serious mental illness. It should be noted that these experiences of mental illness are highly gendered.⁸⁵ While boys and girls have similar mental health outcomes before puberty, the mental health of girls deteriorates significantly during their teenage years compared to boys. Teenage girls are twice as likely as boys to suffer from serious mental illnesses, typically anxiety or major depressive disorders.⁸⁶

Additionally, girls are more than twice as likely to be hospitalised for intentional self-harm. Nearly 1 in 4 girls aged 16-17 report having self-harmed.⁸⁷ The significant gender disparity in mental health outcomes points to the intricate connections between mental health and other gender-specific challenges faced by young Australian women. Issues like declining self-confidence, high rates of sexual abuse, and gendered constraints about life and career possibilities are not isolated; they interact and compound each other, contributing to overall poor mental health.

4.1.4 STEM Career Aspirations & Early Gender Bias

By age 14, most Australian students have decided whether to pursue a STEM-related career pathway.⁸⁸ Confidence in maths abilities starts young, with 42% of Year 4 boys being confident in their maths skills compared to 33% of girls.⁸⁹ Despite this confidence gap, international maths tests show no innate

⁸¹ “Children and Young People.” 2024. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. July 19, 2024. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/children-and-young-people#:~:text=The%20average%20age%20at%20which,than%2014%20years%20of%20age..>

⁸² “Problematic Sexual Behaviour among Young Children Raises Concerns for Teachers.” 2016. Home. 2016. <https://www.unisa.edu.au/unisanews/2019/july/story7/>.

⁸³ “Stress and Trauma.” 2024. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. February 14, 2024. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/mental-health/stress-and-trauma>.

⁸⁴ “Australia’s Youth: Subjective Wellbeing.” 2021. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. June 25, 2021. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/subjective-wellbeing>.

⁸⁵ Mission Australia & Black Dog Institute. (2020). *Youth survey report 2020*. Mission Australia. <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey/>

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ “Measure for Measure: Gender Equality in Australia - per Capita.” 2023. Per Capita. July 10, 2023.

⁸⁸ Cripps, John, and Clark. 2008. “Opening up Pathways: Engagement in STEM across the Primary-Secondary School Transition a Review of the Literature Concerning Supports and Barriers to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Engagement at Primary-Secondary Transition. Commissioned by the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.” https://deakinSTEMe.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/STEM_Opening-up-Pathways-July_08.pdf.

⁸⁹ https://www.chiefscientist.gov.au/sites/default/files/OCS_Women_in_STEM_datasheet.pdf

difference in maths ability between boys and girls. However, girls disproportionately think maths will not help them in future studies (33% vs 20%) or to get a job (24% vs 16%).⁹⁰ When asked to draw a scientist, 66% of 9-year-old children draw a man rather than a woman as a scientist⁹¹. This trend continues throughout schooling with disparities in Year 12 STEM subject enrolment ratios (men:women): Physics: 3:1, Advanced maths 1.9:1, Intermediate maths: 1.3:1, Entry maths 1:1.1, Biology: 1:1.9.⁹² Societal stereotypes and biases contribute to the differences in career aspirations and subject enrolment. In the long-term, these limit young women's career opportunities and economic potential by discouraging them from pursuing male-dominated fields and creating a confidence gap that affects their choices.

4.1.5 Digital Harassment

As of 2020, Australian teenagers spend over three hours daily on social media platforms, with 60% of this activity unmonitored by parents.⁹³ Young women are disproportionately affected by online harassment, with 70% reporting experiences of cyberbullying, sexual harassment, and pressure to share explicit content.⁹⁴ The inescapable and often hostile online environment has severe implications for young women's mental health and self-esteem, further compounding challenges in their educational and personal lives.

Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory notes how social interactions and cultural contexts determine cognitive development.⁹⁵ Learning is inherently social, and individuals develop cognitive abilities through interactions with more knowledgeable community members, such as teachers and peers. Thus, the school environment, especially as the first point of immersive real-world exposure, shapes identity, self-concept, aspirations, and perceptions of abilities. Further, per Erikson's theory, schools are pivotal for developing a coherent sense of self during adolescence.⁹⁶ The structured school setting allows students to explore roles, receive feedback, and form relationships, all contributing to identity development. When this environment is characterised by gender bias and negativity, such as differential treatment by teachers, reinforcement of stereotypes, declining confidence, sexual abuse trauma, and mental health struggles, it contorts identity and aspirations and entrenches disadvantage. Given the cumulative nature of identity and disadvantage, and the fact that career paths—especially high-performing ones—require specific educational achievements and subject choices, school has lifelong implications.

4.2 Primary Research

What does YWA research, including our survey, interviews, literature reviews, and expert consultations, say about young people's, particularly young women's experience?

⁹⁰ OECD (2020), "Girls' and boys' performance in PISA", in *PISA 2018 Results (Volume II): Where All Students Can Succeed*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f56f8c26-en>.

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² https://www.chiefscientist.gov.au/sites/default/files/OCS_Women_in_STEM_datasheet.pdf

⁹³ "Measure for Measure: Gender Equality in Australia - per Capita." 2023. Per Capita. July 10, 2023. https://percapita.org.au/our_work/measure-for-measure-gender-equality-in-australia/.

⁹⁴ Ibid

⁹⁵ Gowrie NSW. "Vygotsky's Theory." <https://www.gowriensw.com.au/thought-leadership/vygotsky-theory>

⁹⁶ Abbasi, Neda. University of Melbourne. "Adolescent Identity Formation and the School Environment." <https://rest.neptune-prod.its.unimelb.edu.au/server/api/core/bitstreams/5fc57f8d-ff59-5c3a-a0f7-e36a4ca83456/content>.

4.2.1 Survey Findings

Men believe their education addressed gender discrimination and human rights more effectively than women believe it did. Additionally, men are more confident that educational materials reflected women's perspectives. They agree that boys are smarter than girls, underscoring persistent gender stereotypes. Men also report greater comfort speaking up in class, suggesting greater empowerment in educational settings. On the other hand, women report slightly higher awareness of opportunities for advancement in education and work.

Hence, there is a need for educational institutions to challenge gender biases, ensure equal representation in course materials, and create an environment where all students can participate. This is imperative as stepwise linear regressions,⁹⁷ conducted separately for men and women, find educational experiences are strongly linked to future mental health. Feeling comfortable speaking up at school emerges as the primary common indicator of good mental health for both genders. Additionally, for women, positive predictors of good mental health in adulthood include leaving school feeling more confident in their abilities, being informed about their rights as human beings, and having educational materials that reflect women's perspectives.

For men, positive predictors of good mental health in adulthood include adequate coverage of gender discrimination in the real world during their school education.

Thus, educational foundations are crucial for positive long-term outcomes.

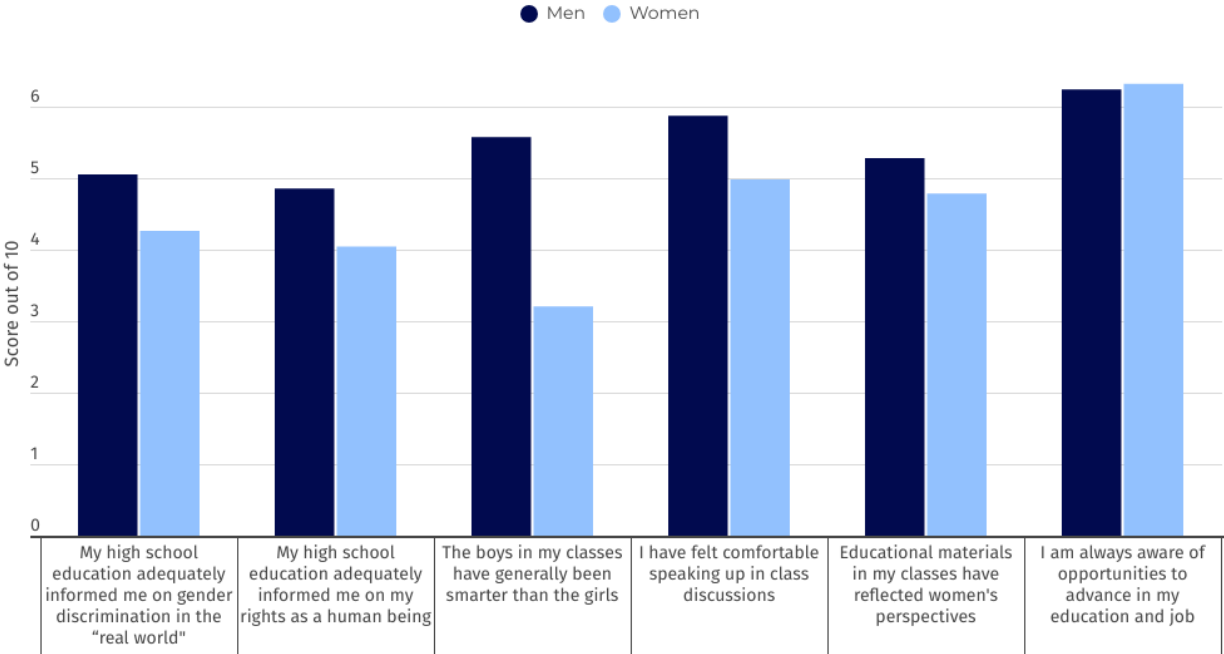
Table 5: Education by Gender

Education by Gender Variable	Gender Identity	
	Men	Women
My high school education adequately informed me on gender discrimination in the “real world”	5.06 (5.00)	4.27 (4.00)
My high school education adequately informed me on my rights as a human being	4.86 (5.00)	4.05 (4.00)
The boys in my classes have generally been smarter than the girls	5.58 (6.00)	3.21 (3.00)

⁹⁷ Stepwise linear regression is a method used in statistics to build a regression model by automatically selecting which independent variables to include. This process involves iteratively adding or removing potential explanatory variables based on their statistical significance, with the goal of identifying a model that best explains the dependent variable.

I have felt comfortable speaking up in class discussions	5.88 (6.00)	4.99 (5.00)
Educational materials in my classes have reflected women's perspectives	5.29 (5.00)	4.79 (4.00)
I am always aware of opportunities to advance in my education and job	6.25 (7.00)	6.33 (7.00)

Figure 5: Education by Gender



4.2.2 Interview Insights

Young women highlighted six thematic challenges, organised by summary of main points, representative quotes, words most mentioned, problems most mentioned, and solutions most mentioned.

4.2.2.1 Theme 1: Importance of Life Skills Education

Summary of main points:

1. There is a critical need for life skills education in Australian schools, as current curricula often fail to prepare students for real-world challenges.
2. Life skills education should include consent, respectful relationships, and gender equality, which are either overlooked or inadequately addressed currently.
3. Many students report a distinct lack of preparedness for real-world challenges upon leaving school, noting a gap between academic education and real world success.
4. There is strong advocacy for early and continuous education on sensitive topics, starting from primary school and continuing through high school, to ensure deep understanding and lasting behaviour change.
5. Students express a preference for interactive and practical approaches to education on these topics, rather than traditional lecture-style teaching methods.

Representative quotes:

1. “I really like the programs where they teach you about consent and respectful relationships, but the current ones delivered in schools are pretty terrible.”
2. “In health and physical education, we should learn about how to report sexual violence.”
3. “I feel like the sorts of talks and educational programs about sexual assault and violence should be starting at a way younger age, so it's instilled in children from youth.”
4. “I think it's really just understanding like what their rights are, you know, what their basic human rights are and what sexual assault is. We need to be taught that.”
5. “I think about myself, and I was raised in a family where racism was rife, that was the norm. I went to school. That was not on. I learnt better. My values shifted.” (Shows that education can be a powerful tool for changing opinions, especially harmful ones)

Words most mentioned:



Problems most mentioned:

1. The current education system lacks comprehensive life skills education, leaving students ill-prepared for many aspects of adult life, including their careers, finances, self-efficacy, relationships, and overall wellbeing and health.
2. There is insufficient education on crucial topics such as consent and respectful relationships, leading to an inability to adequately navigate issues in personal and professional interactions.
3. Many students graduate with inadequate knowledge of women's rights and history, limiting their understanding of gender issues in society.
4. There is limited understanding among students about sexual violence and the procedures for reporting it, leaving them vulnerable or unable to seek help when needed.
5. Critical life skills topics are often introduced too late in the educational journey, missing the opportunity to shape attitudes and behaviours from an early age.
6. The curriculum for life skills education is inconsistent across schools, leading to disparities in student preparedness depending on their educational institution.

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Comprehensive life skills education from an early age would ensure students are better prepared for the challenges of adult life.
2. Mandatory courses on consent and respectful relationships would help foster healthier interpersonal dynamics and reduce potential conflicts or misunderstandings.
3. Women's rights history in high school curricula would provide students with a better understanding of gender issues and the progress made in equality.
4. Practical education on reporting sexual violence would empower students to seek help and support when needed, creating a safer environment for all.
5. Age-appropriate, culturally relevant educational programs would ensure that life skills education is engaging and relatable for students of all backgrounds.
6. A consistent, structured curriculum across all schools would help eliminate disparities.

Young Australians emphasise the need for comprehensive life skills education in schools. This education should focus on consent, respectful relationships, and gender equality. Many express feeling unprepared for real-world challenges, demonstrating a failure of the current educational curricula. Hence, there should be early and continuous education on topics such as consent, gender discrimination, sexual violence, and the history of women's rights. Students prefer interactive and practical approaches to ensure engagement with the material. **The importance of gender-specific education, including emotional regulation and healthy masculinity, is also highlighted.**

4.2.2.2 Theme 2: University Experience and Gender Dynamics**Summary of main points:**

1. Gendered dynamics in university classrooms and discussions are prevalent, resulting in unequal participation of female students; this was highlighted across fields, although particularly in STEM.

2. There is a high prevalence of imposter syndrome among female students, impeding their academic confidence and performance.
3. Universities have implemented consent modules and respectful relationships programs, but their effectiveness is questioned by students.
4. Students face challenges in balancing academic demands with personal life, leading to stress and burnout.
5. Extracurricular activities and leadership programs play an important role in personal development and career preparation, but participation can be limited by time constraints and lack of awareness.

Representative quotes:

1. “At university, I struggle to speak up in class or feel academically prepared. There’s a group of boys who take up most of the room in terms of talking.”
2. “When we are starting as students, we need to do this module on our student learning website called WADL, which just requires us to click through. It was horrible, it didn’t teach anyone anything, let alone change behaviour.”
3. “When I’m at university, it can definitely affect how I don’t want to be seen as a know-it-all.”
4. “I bought my own textbooks for university. I, I don’t know, organised everything myself, there was hardly any guidance.”
5. “I didn’t know about any programs and it was pure luck that I found out about it.”

Words most mentioned:



Problems most mentioned:

1. Female students experience underestimation and imposter syndrome, which can negatively impact their academic performance and career aspirations.
2. Male dominance in classroom discussions can lead to the silencing or marginalisation of female voices, limiting diverse perspectives or learning opportunities.

3. Students find online consent and respectful relationships modules ineffective, as they can be easily clicked through without genuine engagement or learning, and they don't offer real models of interpersonal interaction and its challenges.
4. The difficulty in balancing academic demands with personal life is a stressor for students, affecting their overall well-being and academic success.
5. Students relocating for university, especially those from rural areas, face challenges in adapting to new environments and managing independence.
6. First-year students often receive limited practical support in navigating university life, getting internships, or planning for their careers, leading to overwhelm.

Solutions most mentioned:

1. More inclusive classroom environments would encourage equal participation and representation of all students, regardless of gender.
2. Effective, in-person consent and respectful relationships programs could ensure better engagement and understanding of these critical issues.
3. Support services for balancing academic and personal life would help students manage stress and improve overall well-being.
4. Programs for students relocating for university could ease the transition.
5. Practical guidance specifically tailored for first-year students would help them navigate the challenges of university life.
6. Women's participation and confidence in academic settings through targeted programs and mentorship could help address gender disparities in university experiences.

The university experience for young Australians reveals gendered dynamics. Female students face underestimation and imposter syndrome, with male peers frequently dominating discussions. Still, many women find their education fulfilling, particularly when aligned with their passions and career goals. Universities offer consent modules and respectful relationships programs; these are mostly ineffective due to their online, click-through nature. Balancing academic demands with personal life remains a common stressor, exacerbated by unpaid placements and extensive workloads. The transition to university life, while challenging for all students, is particularly difficult for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, those relocating from rural areas, and those without family support. There is a need for more inclusive classroom environments, effective in-person programs on consent and respectful relationships, and targeted assistance for students facing relocation or first-year challenges.

4.2.2.3 Theme 3: Educational Inequality and Socioeconomic Factors

Summary of main points:

1. Socioeconomic status has a defining impact on access to quality education, creating disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes.
2. There are notable disparities between public and private schools in terms of resources, affecting the quality of education students receive.
3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, particularly those in rural areas, face challenges in accessing and succeeding in higher education.
4. Financial barriers to tertiary education remain a significant obstacle.

5. Systemic changes are needed to address discrimination and inequality in the education system, particularly in regional and rural areas.

Representative quotes:

1. “I find that accessing opportunities is pretty hard if you're not used to it and good at it.”
2. “For First Nations women it is really hard because we don't think we can succeed and then we can't find the resources or programs to help us.”
3. “Scholarships or tuition support or a tuition policy based on income would open so many more doors for so many more people, especially those in a lower socioeconomic bracket.”
4. “I've seen a lot of the women in my area just not engaging with higher education or academics. Education is an investment and a lot of people from low socioeconomic areas do not have the freedom to invest in education when financial issues and family issues are pressing.”
5. “I definitely didn't have enough support at school. There was no preparation for the real world or university.”
6. “I feel like [having free tertiary education] would open so many more doors for so many more people, especially those in a lower socioeconomic bracket.”
7. “[Educational and mentoring programs] don't address the system. It's not going to address the innate discrimination between young men and young women in, like, regional Queensland.”
8. “I've seen a lot of the women in my area just not engaging with higher education or academics.”
9. “I'd increase the support for regional students, relocating to large institutions.”

Words most mentioned:



Problems most mentioned:

1. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds have limited access to quality education, perpetuating cycles of educational disadvantage.
2. Public schools lack resources compared to private schools, creating an uneven playing field for students based on their family's financial situation.
3. First Nations students, especially those in rural areas, face multiple barriers including cultural, geographic, and financial obstacles to accessing higher education.

4. The high cost of tertiary education poses a financial obstacle for many students, deterring some from pursuing higher education altogether.
5. There is a noticeable disengagement from higher education in low socioeconomic communities, often due to financial constraints and lack of role modelling.

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Free or more affordable tertiary education would remove a significant barrier for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.
2. Support and resources for public schools would help level the playing field between public and private education.
3. Targeted programs for First Nations students could address the specific challenges they face in accessing and succeeding in higher education.
4. Mentorship programs with teacher involvement would provide additional guidance for students navigating the education system.
5. More support for students from rural and regional areas, such as accommodation assistance and transition programs, could improve their access to educational opportunities.

Educational inequality in Australia is influenced by socioeconomic status, geographic location, and cultural background. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds struggle to access quality education and engage with higher education opportunities. Public schools have significantly less resources than private institutions which demand a fee. This creates a disparity between the educational experiences of individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, especially those in rural areas, face additional barriers including cost, location, lack of support, and transport issues. The financial burden of tertiary education is a major deterrent for many, with calls for free or more affordable education as a mechanism for increasing accessibility. However, it's recognised that educational programs alone cannot address systemic discrimination, especially in regional and rural areas. Solutions include implementing free or more affordable tertiary education, increasing support for public schools, developing targeted programs for First Nations students, creating mentorship programs, addressing systemic discrimination through policy changes, and providing more support for students from rural and regional areas.

4.2.2.4 Theme 4: Transition from High School to University

Summary of main points:

1. There is a notable lack of preparedness for real-world responsibilities among high school graduates, highlighting gaps in life skills education.
2. Students struggle with making new friends and managing social aspects of university life, which can impact their overall well-being.
3. The stress of balancing multiple responsibilities, including academics, part-time work, and personal life, is a common issue for university students.
4. There is a need for better integration between high school and university curricula to ease the transition and better prepare students for tertiary education.

Representative quotes:

1. "I definitely didn't have enough support at school. There was no preparation for the real world."
2. "That transition from high school to university is really, really hard. I can't emphasise that enough. You're adrift and no one is there to bring you back to shore. Combine that with the challenges of being a young woman. I.. it was so hard."
3. "My mental health was the worst in the transition from high school to whatever came next. It was so difficult and there was such a dearth of resources. Literally nothing."
4. "I was fortunate that I went to university within the same city that I lived in."
5. "I organised everything myself."
6. "I think particularly in Australia, we don't really recognise first generation students as they, like in the US they have sort of scholarships and programs and all that stuff for first generation students because they recognise that there's, at least some of the colleges recognise that."

Words most mentioned:



Problems most mentioned:

1. Students feel inadequately prepared for the academic demands of university, leading to struggles in adapting to the new learning environment.
2. High schools often fail to provide sufficient life skills education, leaving students unprepared for the practical aspects of independent living.
3. The newfound independence of university life can be overwhelming for many students, who struggle to manage their time and responsibilities effectively.
4. Making new friends and integrating into the social fabric of university can be challenging, particularly for students who have relocated or are naturally introverted.
5. Balancing academic responsibilities with personal life and often part-time work creates significant stress for many university students.
6. Students relocating for university face additional challenges in adapting to a new environment, often without the support systems they had at home.

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Comprehensive transition programs in high schools would better prepare students for the academic and personal challenges of university life.
2. More realistic guidance on university life could help students mentally prepare for the transition.

3. Life skills courses as part of the high school curriculum would equip students with practical knowledge for independent living.
4. Mentorship programs for first-year university students could provide valuable support.
5. Support services for students managing multiple responsibilities would help them balance their academic and personal lives.
6. Specific programs and mentoring for students relocating for university could provide necessary support, alleviating the mental health burden associated with significant life changes.

The transition after high school is marked by feelings of unpreparedness, isolation, and overwhelming lifestyle changes. Students feel that their high school education does not adequately prepare them for the academic and social demands of university life. The sudden need to manage newfound independence, including organising textbooks, managing finances, and university work can be particularly stressful. Making new friends and integrating into the university social environment is another challenge, especially for those relocating from rural areas and different cities. The experience can be even more daunting for first-generation university students who do not know what to expect, and have limited assistance in moving due to a lack of family support. There is a need for **comprehensive transition programs in high schools**, more realistic guidance on university life and expectations, and the inclusion of life skills courses in the high school curriculum. Mentorship programs for first-year students, enhanced support services for managing multiple responsibilities, and specific programs for students relocating for university could ease this transition.

4.2.2.5 Theme 5: Need for Financial Education in Schools

Summary of main points:

- There is a strong demand among young Australians for comprehensive financial education to be included in school curricula.
- Students report feeling unprepared for real-world financial responsibilities upon leaving school.
- There is a specific need for education on managing finances, understanding taxes, and creating and sticking to budgets.
- Starting financial literacy education early is seen as crucial for building a strong foundation of financial knowledge.

Representative quotes:

1. “I did not learn about how to manage my finances whatsoever in high school.”
2. “Starting financial education programs from a grassroots level at schools.”
3. “I literally had no idea we had to do that [pay bills, sort out utilities].”
4. “Nothing in school was connected to real-world finances. Nothing at all.”

Words most mentioned:



Problems most mentioned:

1. The current high school curriculum lacks comprehensive financial management education, leaving students ill-prepared for managing their finances as adults.
2. Many students graduate with insufficient knowledge about basic household financial responsibilities, such as budgeting, paying bills, and managing utilities.
3. The absence of practical financial education often leads to students feeling overwhelmed by real-world financial tasks after graduation.
4. Financial concepts and responsibilities are often introduced too late in a student's education, missing the opportunity to build good financial habits early.

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Comprehensive financial education programs in schools would ensure students graduate with a solid understanding of personal finance.
2. Financial literacy education from the primary school level would allow for a gradual build-up of financial knowledge and skills.
3. Practical life skills courses in the high school curriculum would better prepare students for the realities of adult life.
4. Specific education on taxes, bills, and household financial management would address key areas where many young adults struggle.
5. Age-appropriate financial education throughout school years would ensure a progressive understanding of financial concepts.
6. Hands-on, interactive financial management workshops would make financial education more engaging and memorable for students.

Young Australians express a strong need for comprehensive financial education in schools. Many highlight the lack of practical life skills taught in high school, such as managing finances, understanding taxes, and budgeting. This gap in education leaves young Australians unprepared as they transition into adulthood and face financial independence. There is a consensus that financial literacy should be a mandatory part of the curriculum, starting from kindergarten and continuing throughout their school

years. Young adults advocate for age-appropriate financial education, beginning with basic concepts in primary school and progressing to more complex financial management skills in high school. Practical, hands-on approaches are preferred, such as interactive workshops on budgeting, tax filing, and understanding bills and utilities. There is also support for lessons that incorporate managing simulated financial responsibilities.

4.2.2.6 Theme 6: Support for Students with Disabilities

Summary of main points:

- Support for students with disabilities in Australian education is inconsistent and inadequate, varying between institutions.
- Students with disabilities face challenges in obtaining necessary accommodations, meaning they cannot fully participate in their education.
- There is a lack of teacher training and awareness about various disabilities, particularly invisible ones such as ADHD and autism.
- Early intervention and better education on neurodivergence are crucial for improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities.

Representative quotes:

1. “People need to be more adequately educated about disabilities and how they affect people.”
2. “Teachers don’t necessarily have the training to know how to approach a child who has been traumatised.”
3. “I think because we focus on male rather than female symptoms, my disabilities as a woman weren’t picked up early on.”
4. “The ADHD symptoms that I experience really affect all areas of my life at varying degrees.”

Words most mentioned:



Problems most mentioned:

- 1. Educational institutions provide inadequate support and accommodations for students with disabilities, hindering their ability to fully engage in their studies.
- 2. There is a significant lack of comprehensive teacher training on various disabilities and neurodivergence, leading to misunderstandings. This is particularly the case with invisible disabilities.
- 3. Conditions like ADHD are often diagnosed late, especially in females, resulting in prolonged academic struggles and self-esteem issues.
- 4. Undiagnosed conditions have a negative impact on academic performance and self-esteem, affecting students' overall educational experience and future prospects.

Solutions most mentioned:

- 1. Training for teachers on various disabilities and neurodivergence would improve their ability to support and accommodate all students effectively.
- 2. Early intervention and screening programs for conditions like ADHD could help identify and support students earlier, preventing prolonged struggles.
- 3. Resources and support staff for students with disabilities would ensure more consistent and adequate assistance throughout their education.
- 4. Trauma-informed approaches in education would better equip schools to support students who have experienced trauma, which often intersects with disabilities.

Students with disabilities are not accommodated for in Australia’s education system. Reflecting on their educational experiences, disabled students noted no or very limited support available to them due a lack of teacher training and awareness about visible and invisible disabilities. This lack of awareness is particularly problematic for women, as invisible disabilities like ADHD and autism present differently in girls. This leads to late diagnoses and prolonged struggles with academic performance and self-esteem. The impact of these challenges extends beyond academics, affecting all areas of students' lives. There must be comprehensive training for teachers on various disabilities and neurodivergence, including trauma-informed approaches. The training must encompass how neurodivergence presents differently in boys and girls. Early intervention and screening programs, especially for conditions like ADHD and Autism, could significantly improve educational outcomes. Increasing resources and support staff for students with disabilities, and creating more inclusive and understanding educational environments is crucial. Improving awareness about invisible disabilities among educators and students can help foster a more supportive atmosphere.

4.4 Policy Recommendations

Based on these learnings from primary research, YWA recommends the following **targeted policy recommendations** to address the identified issues.

4.4.1 Sliding Scale Tuition Policy for Disadvantaged Students

Recommendation:	Sliding Scale Tuition Policy for Disadvantaged Students
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Objective(s):	To make higher education more accessible for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds by decreasing their debt burden.
Target Area:	Educational accessibility.
Rationale:	A sliding scale tuition policy and enhanced support for disadvantaged students are crucial for increasing the accessibility and equitability of higher education. Education has been demonstrated to be a key factor in occupational success and can mitigate the adverse effects of low parental socioeconomic status. Studies indicate that education accounts for 22-42% of the impact of low parental socioeconomic status on later life health outcomes for women, meaning that a significant portion of the adverse health effects associated with growing up in a low socioeconomic environment can be mitigated through higher educational attainment. Additionally, higher education is linked to better well-being, less psychological distress, and more stable long-term romantic partnerships.
Timeline for Implementation:	18 months

Status Quo:

University tuition in Australia is largely enabled through the Higher Education Loan Program (HELP), which allows students to defer payment until their income exceeds a specified threshold of \$48,361 for the 2022–23 income year. The debt is interest-free but is indexed annually. The government’s proposed change is to calculate indexation using the lower of the CPI or the Wage Price Index (WPI). This adjustment is intended to prevent student debts from increasing at a rate higher than wage growth, making it more manageable for graduates to repay their loans. The government plans to backdate these changes to June 1, 2023. This means that the 7.1% indexation applied in 2023 would be reduced to 3.2%, based on the WPI. This adjustment is expected to provide substantial debt relief, wiping out around \$3 billion in debt for over three million Australians.

While this deferred payment system and proposed indexation change are positive, they do not adequately address the socioeconomic disparities that restrict low-income students' ability to pursue and complete higher education. The cost of living, including housing and daily expenses, often exceeds what students can afford through part-time work, scholarships, or government assistance like Austudy. This financial strain makes higher education inaccessible, even with deferred tuition payments.⁹⁸ Further, students from disadvantaged backgrounds typically start higher education with a learning gap. Research indicates that these students are, on average, three years behind their peers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds in mathematics and science at age 15.⁹⁹ This disparity can persist into university, affecting their ability to complete their degrees, and requiring them to dedicate more time to their studies than other students. This makes it more difficult to find a financially viable balance between work and study.

⁹⁸ Harvey, A. (2018, April 18). *Universities can't forget about lower socio-economic students*. Pursuit, The University of Melbourne. <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/universities-can-t-forget-about-lower-socio-economic-students>

⁹⁹ Department of Education. *Students from low socio-economic areas*. Australian Curriculum: National STEM Education Resources Toolkit. <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-curriculum/national-stem-education-resources-toolkit/i-want-know-about-stem-education/which-school-students-need-stem-education/students-low-socio-economic-areas>

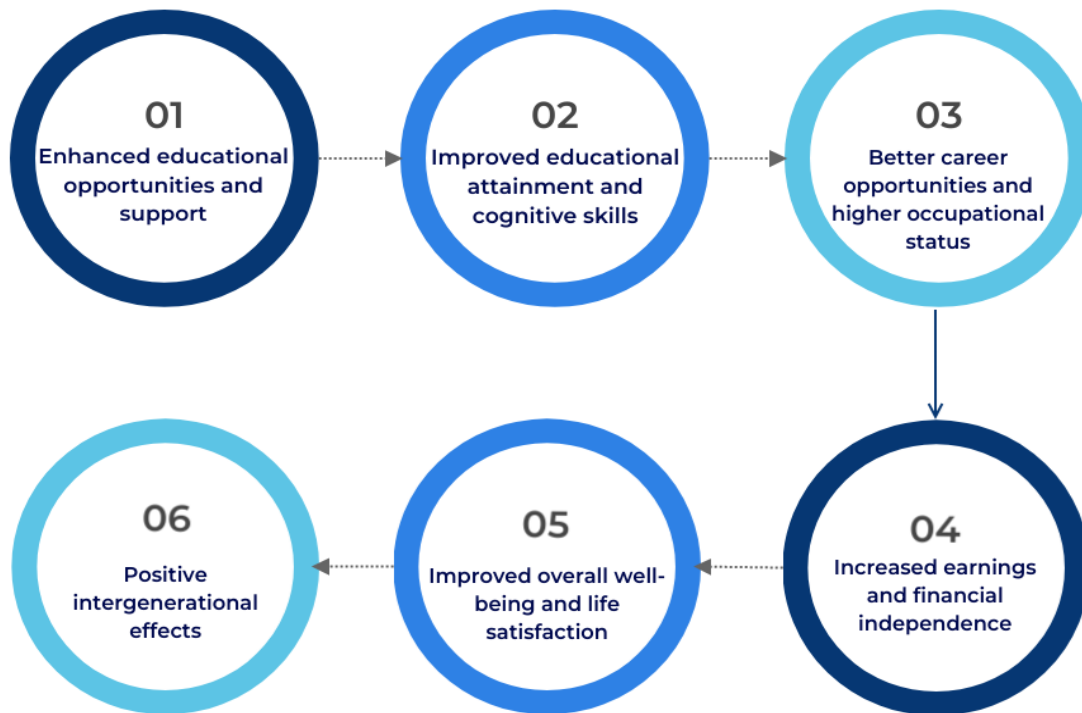
Recommendation Details:

Sliding Scale Tuition Policy:

1. Implement a sliding scale tuition policy where university tuition fees are adjusted based on parental income and the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). This ensures that students from low-income families and disadvantaged areas pay lower tuition fees, making higher education more accessible and affordable; it also clearly demonstrates that all people belong at university and tangible measures are being implemented, alongside the participation targets mentioned in the Universities Accord.¹⁰⁰
2. Conduct an annual assessment of parental income and SEIFA to determine the appropriate tuition fee for each student, ensuring that fees reflect current economic circumstances.
3. Create a tiered fee structure based on the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) tax brackets, integrating SEIFA scores to adjust tuition further. For example, per household income:
 - Taxable Income \$0 – \$18,200: 85% tuition reduction.
 - Taxable Income \$18,201 – \$45,000: 70% tuition reduction.
 - Taxable Income \$45,001 – \$120,000: 50% tuition reduction.
 - Taxable Income \$120,001 – \$180,000: Full tuition.
 - Taxable Income above \$180,001: Full tuition.
4. Ensure a streamlined application process where students provide necessary financial documentation, ensuring confidentiality and ease of access. Collaborate with the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) to verify income information and SEIFA data for accuracy.
5. Monitor the impact of the sliding scale tuition policy on student enrolment, retention, graduation rates, and post-graduate employment and income through measurement and evaluation.

¹⁰⁰ Department of Education. (2024). *Australian Universities Accord: Final report*. Australian Government. <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-universities-accord/resources/final-report>

Theory of Change:



4.4.2 Online Education Support Scheme for Primary School Students

Recommendation:	Online Education Support Scheme for Primary School Students
Objective(s):	To provide personalised support to students from low-income backgrounds who are behind educationally.
Target Area:	Education.
Rationale:	The implementation of a targeted online education support scheme for primary school students is critical for addressing educational disparities and enhancing social mobility. Education plays a vital role in breaking the cycle of disadvantage and promoting upward social mobility. According to the theory of human capital development, ¹⁰¹ early educational interventions are essential for cognitive and non-cognitive skill development, which are critical determinants of future economic and social outcomes. ¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Becker, G. S. (1993). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education* (3rd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

¹⁰² Heckman, J. J. (2008). Schools, skills, and synapses. *Economic Inquiry*, 46(3), 289-324. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1465-7295.2008.00163.x>

	Personalised support based on NAPLAN results can help identify students who need extra assistance in fundamental skills such as reading comprehension, writing, and numeracy. Research indicates that educational lags caught early can be rectified more effectively than those addressed later, as early interventions can leverage the brain's developmental plasticity. By offering tailored tutoring and resources, students can achieve a minimum standard, ensuring they are better prepared for high school and reducing educational disparities.
Timeline for Implementation:	24 months

Status Quo:

There are some support measures in place for disadvantaged students in Australia, but there is no comprehensive national program specifically targeting low-income primary school students with poor NAPLAN results. Access to necessary technology and conducive learning environments varies widely, creating further disparities. As a result, students from low-income families who struggle with fundamental skills such as reading comprehension, writing, and numeracy often lack the personalised support needed to build a strong educational foundation before progressing to high school.

Recommendation Details:

Personalised Support Based on NAPLAN Results

- **Eligibility:** Identify students classified as “Needs Additional Support” in Year 3 and Year 5 NAPLAN assessments in reading comprehension, writing, and numeracy. These students must also be from families in the lowest income bracket per ATO/Australian poverty standards, defined as earning less than \$37,000 annually.
- **Targeted Tutoring:** Provide personalised tutoring programs that include courses and exercises focused on improving reading comprehension, writing, and numeracy skills. These programs will be delivered through an online portal where students progress through modules designed to help them meet national minimum standards.
- **Tutoring Format:** Offer exclusively online tutoring sessions through a dedicated portal. The portal will feature interactive lessons, practice exercises, and instructional videos tailored to each student's needs.

Comprehensive Support Package

- **Technology Access:** Provide each participating student with a package that includes a laptop, desk, chair, and sound bubble to create a conducive learning environment at home.
- **Online Education Access:** Include access to a robust online education platform featuring interactive lessons, practice exercises, and instructional videos that complement the tutoring.
- **Monthly Progress Reports:** Parents and guardians will receive automated monthly reports detailing their child's progress, including completed modules, improvement areas, and upcoming lessons. This ensures that parents are kept informed without necessitating direct involvement.

Parental Incentive

- Tax-Free Cash Bonus: Offer a tax-free cash bonus of \$500 per school term per child to parents and guardians whose children successfully complete the program. This incentive aims to ensure student participation and retention in the program.

Funding and Implementation

- Government Funding: Secure government funding for the pilot program, focusing on low-income families identified through income assessments and SEIFA data.
- Partnerships: Partner with technology companies, educational institutions, and tutoring providers to implement and support the program.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: Compare NAPLAN results of students who have participated in the program in Years 5, 7, and 9, and compare to how in the past, absent this program, students in the “Needs Additional Support” category have fared over time.

Theory of Change:



4.4.3 Gendered Deradicalisation

Recommendation:	Gendered Deradicalisation
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Objective(s):	Challenge traditional narratives and offer a more accurate understanding of human societies and gender roles, encouraging critical reflection on gender stereotypes.
Target Area:	Challenging social attitudes towards women.
Rationale:	The inclusion of a Society course will provide students with a well-rounded education on gender discrimination, human rights, and societal development. This course will address gaps in the current education system by providing evidence-based information and critical analysis of historical and contemporary issues. By challenging traditional narratives and offering a more accurate understanding of human societies and gender roles, students will be encouraged to critically reflect on these issues and develop a deeper understanding of gender equality. Additionally YWA’s original time progression analysis of GBV below highlights negative correlations between gender discrimination and human rights education and GBV perpetration and exposure.
Timeline for Implementation:	18 months

Status Quo:

Australian high school students report inadequate education on gender discrimination and human rights. The traditional education system fails to challenge entrenched gender roles and does not provide sufficient evidence-based information to foster critical thinking on these issues. Consequently, students lack a comprehensive understanding of gender equality and human rights, limiting their ability to critically engage with these topics, advocate for social justice, and recognise inequality in their own lives.

Recommendation Details:

Challenging Gendered Radicalisation: The course will challenge traditional narratives and offer a more accurate understanding of human societies and gender roles, encouraging critical reflection on gender stereotypes. This can be implemented through a public information campaign or curricular integration at high school and tertiary levels. Findings from the YWA Survey highlight that gender roles are a top reason cited for gender inequality and violence, with “hard evidence” identified as the top mechanism for challenging these roles.

This course will build on the foundational work of initiatives like Man Cave.¹⁰³ While Man Cave focuses primarily on contemporary issues of masculinity and uses personal stories and peer discussions to drive change, this course will employ rigorous, evidence-based learning. Drawing from recent anthropological studies that debunk modern gender stereotypes, the course will equip students with hard evidence that challenges the notion of “natural” gender roles. Moreover, the course will extend Man Cave’s focus on personal development into the realm of civic responsibility by incorporating comprehensive education on human rights.

¹⁰³ <https://themancave.life/>

Specifically, the course will include:

- **Cooperative Affluent Societies:** The course should include studies on cooperative affluent societies, like the Copper Age society of southern Iberia, to challenge the dominant historical narrative that advanced societies inevitably develop hierarchies and inequalities. These studies will help foster critical thinking about societal development and human nature, encouraging students to question traditional views of civilisation formation.
- **Re-evaluation of Gender Roles through History:** The course will critically examine the evolution of gender roles, emphasising their historical context and the impact of socio-economic changes. It will include discussions on equitable gender roles in pre-capitalist societies and how modern gender stereotypes have been debunked by recent anthropological research. Providing “hard evidence” will challenge the view that gender roles are “natural,” promoting a more accurate understanding of gender equality.
- **Misinterpretation of Early Primate Research and Challenging Patriarchal Narratives:** The course will critically examine early 20th-century primatology, particularly Solly Zuckerman's flawed ‘Monkey Hill’ experiment, which was used to justify male dominance as natural and unchangeable. It will highlight how this androcentric research underpinned the belief in biologically rooted patriarchy, despite being challenged by modern studies. The course will explore diverse gender dynamics in primates, revealing that 42% of 79 studied species exhibit female dominance or power-sharing, contradicting the assumed universality of male dominance. Historical and anthropological evidence of egalitarian or female-dominated early human societies will be presented to further challenge patriarchal narratives. By examining these topics, students will understand that patriarchy is not universal and will recognise the impact of androcentric bias in early scientific research, encouraging critical thinking about gender dynamics in both human and primate societies.
- **Information on Human Rights:** The course will provide comprehensive education on human rights, referencing key international human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the role of the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). It will also discuss how these international instruments relate to rights under Australian law, including the Australian Constitution and anti-discrimination laws. This education will empower students with the knowledge of their rights and the ability to advocate for themselves and others in the face of discrimination and injustice.

Implementation Plan:

- Integrate the Society course into the high school curriculum, making it mandatory for all Year 9 students, and provide training for teachers to deliver the course effectively.
- Establish a monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the effectiveness of the course and make necessary adjustments based on feedback and outcomes.

Theory of Change:



4.4.4. Gender De-biasing Australian Textbooks

Recommendation:	Gender De-biasing Australian Textbooks
Objective(s):	To foster strong self-esteem and encourage young girls to internalise the belief that they can achieve anything.
Target Area:	Social norms; attitudes towards women.
Rationale:	Research indicates that gender biases in educational materials significantly influence how young children perceive their own abilities. Studies have found that girls as young as those in kindergarten begin to internalise the belief that they are less intelligent or capable than boys, a perception that can lead to diminished aspirations and self-esteem over time. ¹⁰⁴ This issue is exacerbated by the biased representation of gender roles and cultural identities in Australian

¹⁰⁴ Bian, L., Leslie, S.-J., & Cimpian, A. (2017). Gender stereotypes about intellectual ability emerge early and influence children’s interests. *Science*, 355(6323), 389-391. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aah6524>

	textbooks, which often reinforce outdated stereotypes and fail to reflect the diversity of modern Australian society.
Timeline for Implementation:	48 months

Status Quo:

1. **Gender Imbalances:** Australian textbooks frequently portray male characters in positions of authority, leadership, and intelligence, while female characters are depicted in passive or domestic roles. This imbalance not only limits the portrayal of women’s capabilities but also contributes to the early internalisation of gender-based stereotypes.
2. **Narrow Cultural Representation:** The portrayal of Australian identity in textbooks often excludes or marginalises the contributions and perspectives of Indigenous peoples and non-White Australians. This narrow representation can lead to a limited understanding of national identity and perpetuate the marginalisation of minority groups within broader societal narratives.
3. **Occupational Stereotyping:** Textbooks often reinforce traditional gender roles by associating certain occupations with specific genders. For example, women are frequently shown in caregiving roles, while men are depicted in professional or leadership positions. This pattern reinforces societal expectations and discourages students from exploring a full range of career opportunities.

Recommendation Details:

1. **Equal Representation of Genders:**
 - Textbooks should strive for balanced representation of male and female characters, particularly in roles that challenge traditional gender expectations. Depicting women in leadership, scientific, and other non-traditional roles, and men in caregiving or domestic roles, can help counteract the early internalisation of limiting stereotypes.
2. **Inclusive Cultural Narratives:**
 - Educational content should reflect the diversity of Australian society by incorporating the contributions and experiences of Indigenous peoples and non-White Australians. This approach ensures that all students see themselves represented in the narratives and that their cultural heritage is acknowledged and valued.
3. **Diversification of Occupations:**
 - Textbooks should present a wide range of careers for both genders, avoiding the reinforcement of traditional stereotypes. By showcasing men and women in diverse professional roles, students are encouraged to consider a broader array of career paths without the constraints of gendered expectations.
4. **Ongoing Monitoring and Review:**
 - An independent body should be established to oversee the implementation of these recommendations and ensure that textbooks are regularly reviewed for bias. This body would also be responsible for updating educational materials to reflect changes in societal attitudes and ensure that they promote gender equality and inclusivity.

4.4.5 Educational Interventions to Mitigate GBV Perpetration & Exposure

YWA's original time progression analysis¹⁰⁵ of GBV perpetration and exposure reveals the critical intersections between education and increased risk through several key correlations. By understanding these correlations, policymakers can identify precise intervention points and methods to mitigate these risks within the educational context. These interventions align with broader strategies for gender equality, emphasising collective action from educational institutions and communities. Additionally, these interventions have significant benefits for overall educational culture, fostering a more inclusive, respectful, and supportive environment.

Relevant Correlations

For Men

- High personal and mental health distress.
- Belief that “the boys in my classes have generally been smarter than the girls.”
- Feeling that “teachers or professors have discriminated against me because of my gender.”
- Difficulty seeing women's perspectives in disagreements.
- Use of alcohol or drugs to cope with stress.
- Belief that “my gender has limited my ability to achieve my professional goals.”
- Experiencing sexual harassment.

For Women

- High gender and relationship distress.
- Experiencing sexual harassment within educational settings.
- Belief that “my educational experiences so far have been negatively affected by my gender.”
- Mental health concerns related to gender discrimination or bias.

Negative Correlations

- Understanding of issues like gender discrimination and the women’s rights movement (both men and women).
- Belief that men and women should have equal status in society (men).
- Positive educational experiences, such as leaving high school feeling more confident or being adequately informed about human rights (women).

Intervention Points

1. Early educational stages
 - Primary and secondary school years.
2. Higher education
 - University and college years.

¹⁰⁵ Time progression analysis refers to the study of how a particular variable or set of variables changes over time; in this case, how people’s progress through life areas.

3. Periods of academic stress
 - Exam periods, project deadlines, and transitions between educational levels.
4. Incident response
 - Immediately following reports of harassment or discrimination.

Example Intervention Methods

For Men

1. Mental health support and stress management
 - What: Provide access to mental health resources and stress management workshops
 - How: Utilise existing school counselling services and offer workshops during peak stress periods, such as exams
2. Gender equality and healthy relationship education
 - What: Conduct workshops on gender equality and healthy relationships
 - How: Integrate these topics into health or social studies classes and provide annual refresher workshops
3. Inclusive educational policies
 - What: Enforce anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies
 - How: Clearly communicate policies to all students and staff, and establish easy-to-use reporting channels
4. Emotional intelligence and conflict resolution training
 - What: Offer training sessions on emotional intelligence and conflict resolution
 - How: Include these sessions in regular school activities or as part of existing personal development programs

For Women

1. Support for gender-related educational challenges
 - What: Provide mentorship programs and workshops on gender bias and financial literacy
 - How: Leverage existing mentorship networks and offer workshops at the start of each academic year
2. Educational harassment and discrimination procedures
 - What: Implement clear reporting and response procedures for harassment and discrimination
 - How: Ensure procedures are well-publicised and provide immediate support and counselling for reported incidents



SAFETY/RELATIONSHIPS/SEX/GBV

This section is derivative of ‘Young Minds, Old Biases: The Gender-Based Violence Crisis,’ released by YWA on 14th August 2024.

5.2 The Situation

What does existing research say about young people's, particularly young women's experiences?

GBV is endemic, with young women disproportionately affected by physical and sexual assault. Among youth, particularly young men, problematic attitudes towards consent and gender equality persist. Early sexual experiences are marred by dissatisfaction, pressure to conform to unrealistic standards, and the negative influence of pornography; this pattern often continues into adulthood. Personal distress related to sexual issues impacts 50% of Australian women (ages 18-39).¹⁰⁶

5.2.1 Violence Against Women

IPV is the greatest contributor to illness, disability and premature death for Australian women aged 25-44.¹⁰⁷ An ANROWS study using the 'burden of disease' metric,¹⁰⁸ a globally recognised method for evaluating the impact of injuries and illnesses, and comparing various risk factors, found that IPV accounts for an estimated 5.1% of the disease burden among Australian women aged 18-44 years, higher than any other risk factor in the study, including tobacco use, high cholesterol, and illicit drug use.¹⁰⁹ The same study noted that IPV is the greatest contributor to the health disparity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and non-Indigenous women of child-bearing age (ages 18 to 44). Further intersectional disadvantage is evident in that family and domestic violence hospitalisation rates are 33x higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women than for non-Indigenous women, and 48x higher for women in remote areas than those in cities.^{110 111}

Further, in 2022, 86% of sexual assault victims were under 34 years old, with 56% under 18 and 30% aged 18-34.¹¹² Additionally, 22% of women have experienced sexual violence since age 15.¹¹³ Generational differences are evident: 51% of women born between 1989 and 1995 report experiencing sexual violence in their lifetime, compared to 34% of those born between 1973 and 1978, and 26% of

¹⁰⁶ "Most Young Women Unhappy, Stressed about Their Sex Lives: Study." 2020. Monash University. February 25, 2020. <https://www.monash.edu/news/articles/most-young-women-unhappy.-stressed-about-their-sex-lives-study>.

¹⁰⁷ AIHW. 2018. "Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence in Australia." <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/d1a8d479-a39a-48c1-bbe2-4b27c7a321e0/aihw-fdv-02.pdf.aspx?inline=true>.

¹⁰⁸ The 'burden of disease' metric is a comprehensive measure used to assess the impact of diseases and injuries on a population. It combines the effects of both morbidity (illness and disability) and mortality (premature death) to provide a holistic view of health loss within a community. This metric is crucial for understanding public health challenges and guiding policy decisions. The primary metric used to quantify the burden of disease is the Disability-Adjusted Life Year (DALY), which represents the loss of one year of "healthy" life due to either premature death or living with a disability. DALYs are calculated by summing two components: Years of Life Lost (YLL), which measures the years lost due to premature death, and Years Lived with Disability (YLD), which represents the years lived with a health condition or its consequences, weighted by the severity of the condition. The burden of disease can be categorised into non-fatal burden (captured by YLD) and fatal burden (captured by YLL). Additionally, the attributable burden refers to the portion of the disease burden that could be prevented if specific risk factors were eliminated, highlighting the role of modifiable risk factors like smoking or obesity in contributing to the overall disease burden.

¹⁰⁹ ANROWS. (2016). Intimate partner violence contributes highest health risk for women aged 18-44 years. <https://www.anrows.org.au/media-releases/intimate-partner-violence-contributes-highest-health-risk-women-aged/>

¹¹⁰ "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People." 2024. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. July 19, 2024. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people>.

¹¹¹ "Factors Associated with FDSV." 2024. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. July 19, 2024. [https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/understanding-fdsv/factors-associated-with-fdsv#:~:text=In%202021%E2%80%9322%2C%20the%20rate.2\)%20\(AIHW%202023b\)](https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/understanding-fdsv/factors-associated-with-fdsv#:~:text=In%202021%E2%80%9322%2C%20the%20rate.2)%20(AIHW%202023b)).

¹¹² "Young Women." 2024. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/young-women>.

¹¹³ "Personal Safety, Australia, 2021-22 Financial Year." 2023. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Australian Bureau of Statistics. March 15, 2023. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/personal-safety-australia/latest-release#data-downloads>.

those born between 1946 and 1951.¹¹⁴ Experiences of sexual harassment also show a clear age gradient: 38% of women aged 18 to 24, 17.4% of women aged 35 to 44, and 7.1% of women aged 55 and over report such experiences.¹¹⁵

5.2.2 Dangerous Beliefs

The 2021 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS)¹¹⁶ revealed persistent problematic beliefs. Only 27% to 43% of young respondents demonstrated progressive attitudes and understanding of GBV and inequality. Notably, young people were less likely to strongly reject attitudes minimising violence, with only 54% strongly disagreeing that domestic violence is excusable if the perpetrator later expresses regret, compared to 73% of older (25 or older) respondents.¹¹⁷

Gender disparities in attitudes persist among young people, contributing to the perpetuation of violence. Young men (48%) were significantly more likely than young women (25%) to believe that women exaggerate gender inequality.¹¹⁸ Almost 1 in 3 young people agreed that women prefer male dominance in relationships, a view more prevalent among males with 34% of young men holding this view compared to 18% of young women.¹¹⁹

These concerning attitudes continue with consent and sexual assault. Approximately 28% of young people believe that extreme sexual arousal may prevent a man from recognising a woman's lack of consent, while 12% see no harm in sexist jokes.¹²⁰

5.2.3 Sexual Experiences and Well-being

Young women's sexual experiences are characterised by dissatisfaction, pressure, and negative emotional outcomes. Research indicates higher levels of regret, loneliness, and negative self-perception following casual sexual encounters among women than men.¹²¹ 50% of young women (ages 18-39) report sexually-related personal distress (feeling guilty, embarrassed, stressed or unhappy about their sex lives), including issues such as low sexual self-image, arousal, desire, orgasm, and responsiveness dysfunctions.¹²²

The pressure to please partners in heterosexual encounters leads young women to engage in unwanted sexual activities. This dynamic is exacerbated by the internalisation of submissive roles, fear of rejection,

¹¹⁴ Ibid

¹¹⁵ Ibid

¹¹⁶ "Findings for Young Australians NCAS ANROWS." [https://irp.cdn-website.com/f0688f0c/files/uploaded/ANROWS%20-%20NCAS%20Young%20People%20Sub-Report%202023%20\(DIGITAL\)%20-%20FINAL.pdf](https://irp.cdn-website.com/f0688f0c/files/uploaded/ANROWS%20-%20NCAS%20Young%20People%20Sub-Report%202023%20(DIGITAL)%20-%20FINAL.pdf).

¹¹⁷ Ibid

¹¹⁸ McGregor, Viv. 2023. "Media Release: NCAS Findings for Young Australians - ANROWS - Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety." ANROWS - Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. December 12, 2023.

[https://www.anrows.org.au/media-releases/media-release-ncas-young-australians/#:~:text=For%20example%2C%20young%20men%20\(48,aspects%20of%20violence%20against%20women.](https://www.anrows.org.au/media-releases/media-release-ncas-young-australians/#:~:text=For%20example%2C%20young%20men%20(48,aspects%20of%20violence%20against%20women.)

¹¹⁹ "Findings for Young Australians NCAS ANROWS." n.d. [https://irp.cdn-website.com/f0688f0c/files/uploaded/ANROWS%20-%20NCAS%20Young%20People%20Sub-Report%202023%20\(DIGITAL\)%20-%20FINAL.pdf](https://irp.cdn-website.com/f0688f0c/files/uploaded/ANROWS%20-%20NCAS%20Young%20People%20Sub-Report%202023%20(DIGITAL)%20-%20FINAL.pdf).

¹²⁰ Ibid

¹²¹ McKeen, Billie E, Ryan C Anderson, and David A Mitchell. 2022. "Was It Good for You? Gender Differences in Motives and Emotional Outcomes Following Casual Sex." *Sexuality & Culture* 26 (4): 1339–59. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-022-09946-w>.

¹²² "Most Young Women Unhappy, Stressed about Their Sex Lives: Study." 2020. Monash University. February 25, 2020. <https://www.monash.edu/news/articles/most-young-women-unhappy,-stressed-about-their-sex-lives-study>.

limited education on or practice in sexual self-advocacy or assertiveness, and societal expectations. Women describe feelings of vexation, humiliation, and being treated as sexual objects; they struggle to say “no” to sexual partners due to fear of retaliation and societal expectations.^{123 124}

Further, women who regularly scrutinise their appearance, and whose self-esteem is informed by their appearance, tend to be less sexually assertive and more self-conscious during intimate moments, resulting in diminished sexual satisfaction.¹²⁵

5.2.4 Impact of Pornography

Women criticise pornography for promoting unrealistic and harmful sexual behaviours, which they feel pressured to mimic.^{126 127} The consumption of pornography by both short-term and long-term partners shapes women’s sexual encounters, leading to dissatisfaction, negative emotional outcomes, and sexual violence. Many women express discomfort with its content and the roles it assigns to women; noting the pornographic ‘sphere’ seeps significantly into real life.^{128 129}

Studies have investigated the relationship between pornography consumption and violence against women, revealing significant associations:

- A study found a significant association between pornography use and sexual coercion among men high in hostile masculinity and sexual promiscuity, who also consumed more violent sexual content.¹³⁰
- Research shows that pornography use among young Australians is associated with harmful attitudes and behaviours, including risky sexual behaviours, greater sexual objectification of women, rape myth acceptance, and sexual coercion and aggression.¹³¹
- Studies have shown that women who experience IPV (particularly sexual) report that pornography played a role in their abuse. Perpetrators sometimes use pornography as a manual for abuse, forcing their partners to watch it to coerce them into specific sex acts.¹³²

¹²³ Mónica Fernández-Ruiz, Olga María López-Entrambasaguas, Jose Manuel Martínez-Linares, and José Granero-Molina. 2023. “Young Women’s Attitudes and Concerns Regarding Pornography and Their Sexual Experiences: A Qualitative Approach.” *Healthcare* 11 (21): 2877–77. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare11212877>.

¹²⁴ “APA PsycNet.” 2024. Apa.org. 2024. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2Fvio0000198>.

¹²⁵ “Most Young Women Unhappy, Stressed about Their Sex Lives: Study.” 2020. Monash University. February 25, 2020. <https://www.monash.edu/news/articles/most-young-women-unhappy.-stressed-about-their-sex-lives-study>.

¹²⁶ Tarzia, Laura, and Meagan Tyler. 2020. “Recognizing Connections between Intimate Partner Sexual Violence and Pornography.” *Violence against Women* 27 (14): 2687–2708. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801220971352>.

¹²⁷ Mónica Fernández-Ruiz, Olga María López-Entrambasaguas, Jose Manuel Martínez-Linares, and José Granero-Molina. 2023. “Young Women’s Attitudes and Concerns Regarding Pornography and Their Sexual Experiences: A Qualitative Approach.” *Healthcare* 11 (21): 2877–77. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare11212877>.

¹²⁸ Ibid

¹²⁹ Ashton, Sarah, Karalyn McDonald, and Maggie Kirkman. 2019. “Pornography and Women’s Sexual Pleasure: Accounts from Young Women in Australia.” *Feminism & Psychology* 29 (3): 409–32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353519833410>.

¹³⁰ Malamuth, N. M., Addison, T., & Koss, M. (2000). Pornography and sexual aggression: Are there reliable effects and can we understand them? *Annual Review of Sex Research*, 11(1), 26-91. doi:10.1080/10532528.2000.10559784

¹³¹ Wright, P. J., Tokunaga, R. S., & Kraus, A. (2016). A meta-analysis of pornography consumption and actual acts of sexual aggression in general population studies. *Journal of Communication*, 66(1), 183-205. doi:10.1111/jcom.12201

¹³² Lim, M. S. C., Agius, P. A., Carrotte, E. R., Vella, A. M., & Hellard, M. E. (2017). Young Australians’ use of pornography and associations with sexual risk behaviours. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 41(4), 438-443. doi:10.1111/1753-6405.12678

- A meta-analysis of 22 studies identified clear evidence that pornography consumption increases physical and verbal sexual aggression. The association was significant across different countries and demographics.¹³³

Despite these risks, violent pornographic content is widespread. Studies show up to 90% of pornography depicts violence and disrespect towards women.¹³⁴ Additionally, an analysis of 304 scenes from popular porn videos found that 88% of scenes contained physical aggression (e.g., spanking, gagging, slapping), and 48% contained verbal aggression (e.g., insults, threats).¹³⁵ Women were the targets of aggression in 94% of these scenes, showing pleasure, neutrality or submission in response.

5.3 Primary Research

What does YWA research, including our survey, interviews, literature reviews, and expert consultations, say about young people’s, particularly young women’s experience?

5.3.1 Survey Findings

In the survey, respondents were asked to rate a battery of statements on a 10-point scale, with select statements displayed in various tables below.

5.3.1.1 Sex Life

Men find casual sex more empowering, view sex as being about power, and receive better education on sex and consent. Conversely, women indicate they lack adequate sex and consent education and more often experience sex as painful or disempowering.

Table 6: Sex Life by gender

Sex Life Variable	Gender Identity	
	Men	Women
I find casual sex empowering	4.39 (5.00)	3.10 (3.00)

¹³³ DeKeseredy, W. S., & Corsianos, M. (2016). *Violence against women in pornography*. Routledge.

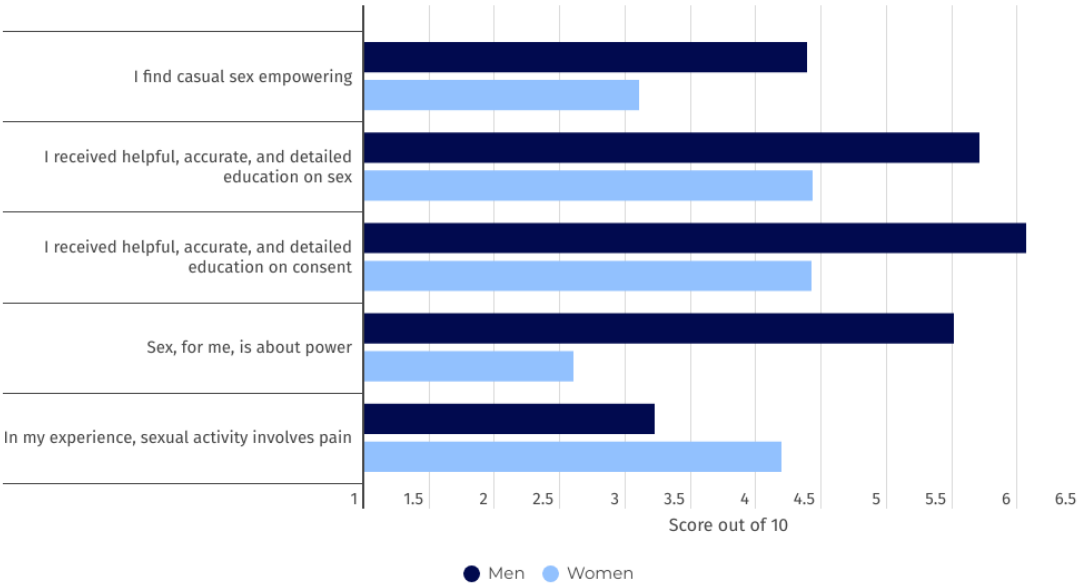
¹³⁴ Chrisafis, A. (2023). Online pornography breaks French law, equality watchdog says. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/27/online-pornography-breaks-french-law-equality-watchdog-france>

¹³⁵ Bridges, A. J., Wosnitzer, R., Scharrer, E., Sun, C., & Liberman, R. (2010). Aggression and sexual behavior in best-selling pornography videos: A content analysis update. *Violence Against Women*, 16(10), 1065-1085. doi:10.1177/1077801210382866

I received helpful, accurate, and detailed education on sex	5.71 (6.00)	4.43 (4.00)
I received helpful, accurate, and detailed education on consent	6.07 (6.00)	4.42 (4.00)
Sex, for me, is about power	5.51 (5.00)	2.60 (2.00)
In my experience, sexual activity involves pain	3.22 (3.00)	4.19 (4.00)

(*Note: Mean (Median))

Figure 6: Sex Life by Gender



5.3.1.2 Relationships

Traditional gender roles remain prevalent, with emphasis on following expected norms and behaviours for each gender in, typically heterosexual, relationship settings. Women note that men expect them to be soft and sweet; men note that women expect them to be strong and independent.

Women express a higher desire for control in their romantic relationships than men. When asked to explain their desire for control, women say it helps them mitigate emotional pain; in past relationships, a lack of control has led to anxiety, insecurity, and abandonment. Men, on the other hand, emphasise the benefits of control, particularly being able to have and do what you want, how you want, and when you want. Male respondents see control as a way of exerting power over their partners, whereas female respondents view control as a means for personal protection.

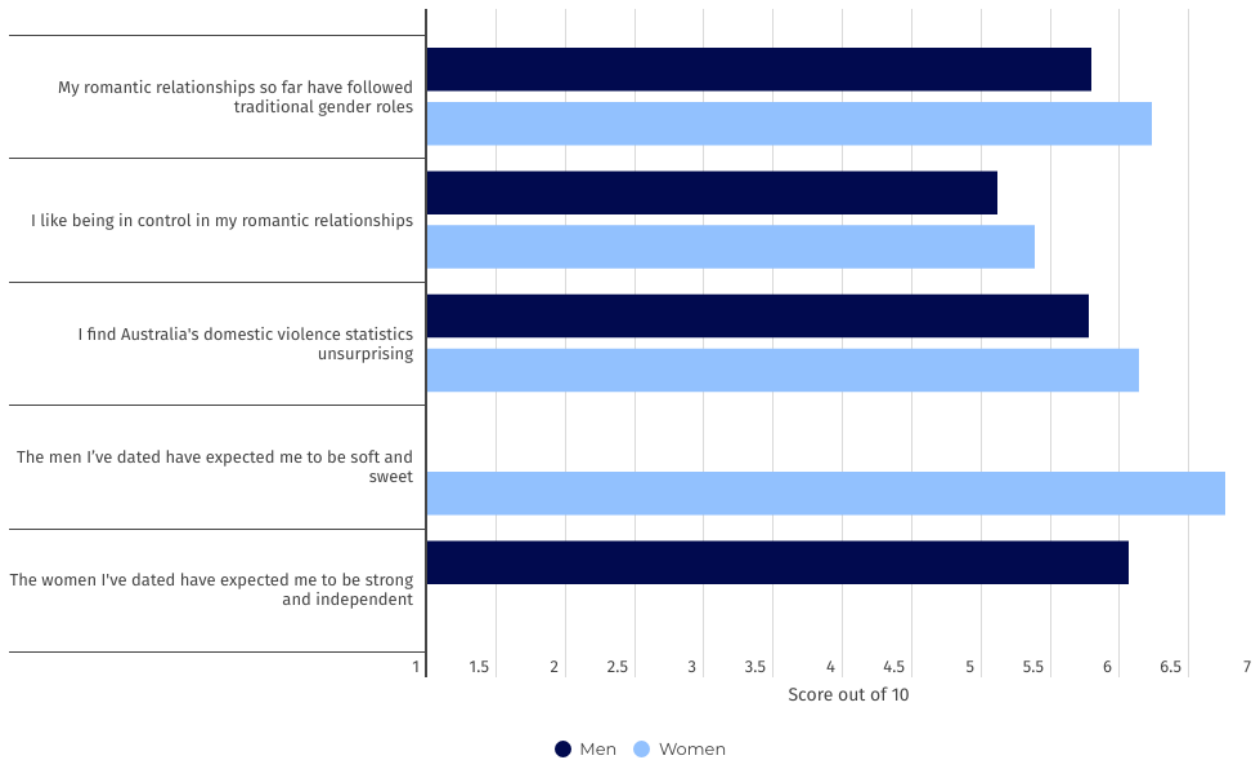
On current domestic violence statistics in Australia, women find these less surprising than men, however, both genders are unsurprised.

Table 7: Relationships by gender

Relationships Variable	Gender Identity	
	Men	Women
My romantic relationships so far have followed traditional gender roles	5.79 (6.00)	6.23 (7.00)
I like being in control in my romantic relationships	5.11 (5.00)	5.38 (5.00)
I find Australia's domestic violence statistics unsurprising	5.77 (6.00)	6.14 (6.00)
The women I've dated have expected me to be strong and independent	6.06 (6.00)	-
The men I've dated have expected me to be soft and sweet	-	6.76 (7.00)

(*Note: Mean (Median) - indicates the question was not asked of this gender)

Figure 7: Relationships by gender



5.3.1.3 Solution Preferences of Women

Women’s preferences on effective gender-based violence interventions were sought in the YWA survey by asking: What would be most effective as a gender-based violence intervention?

Harsher consequences for gender-based violence record the highest mean scores (7.91 and 7.58) and median scores (both 9.00) across women with and without a bachelor's degree. This suggests a widespread belief that increased punitive measures are an effective deterrent. The high ranking likely reflects a desire for justice and accountability, as well as a belief that current consequences are insufficient to prevent GBV.

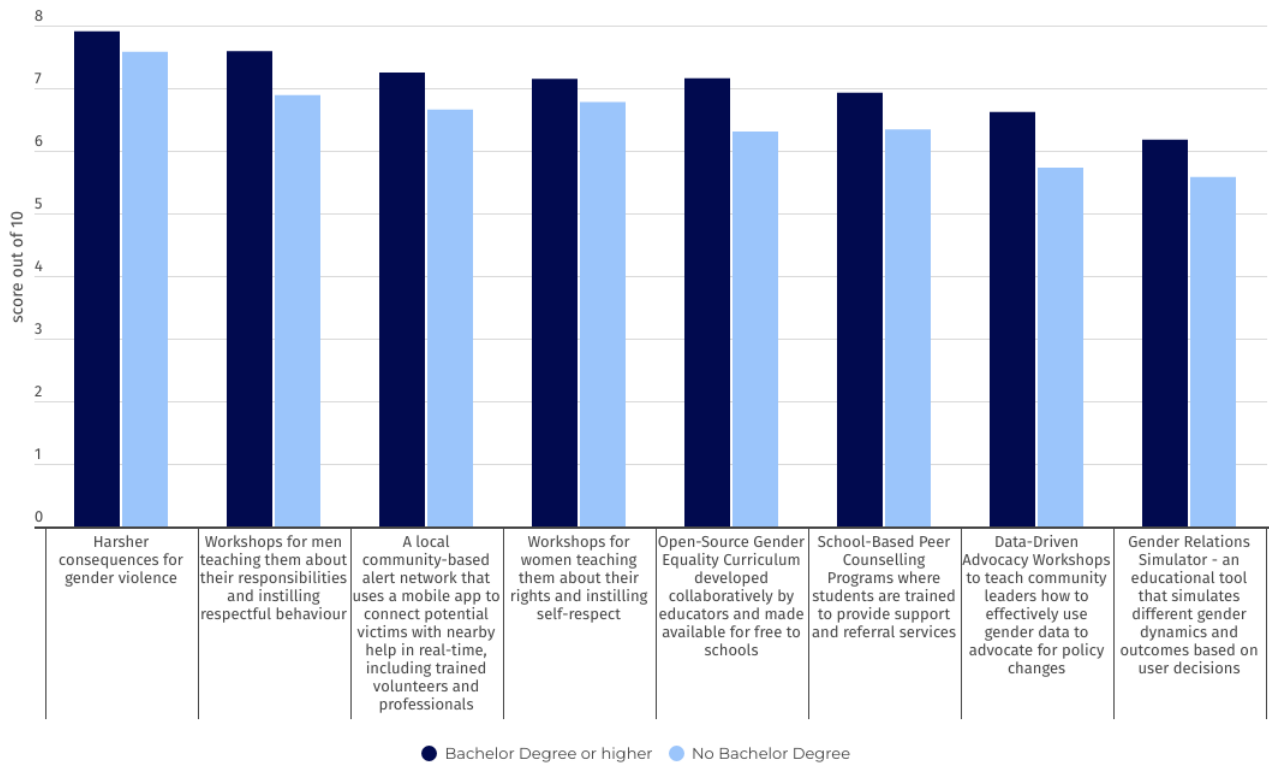
Workshops for men teaching responsibilities and respectful behaviour rank second overall, with mean scores of 7.59 and 6.89 for those with and without bachelor's degrees, respectively. This high ranking indicates a recognition that addressing male behaviour and attitudes is crucial in combating gender violence.

A real-time community alert network (using mobile apps to connect at-risk community members) also receives support across both groups (mean scores of 7.25 and 6.66). Technology-driven solutions can provide immediate, practical assistance to victims; there is a perceived value of community involvement and rapid response in addressing GBV.

Table 8: Most effective gender-based violence interventions

What would be most effective as a gender-based violence intervention?	Education Level	
	Bachelor's degree or higher	No Bachelor's degree
Harsher consequences for gender-based violence	7.91 (9.00)	7.58 (9.00)
Workshops for men teaching them about their responsibilities and instilling respectful behaviour	7.59 (8.00)	6.89 (7.00)
A local community-based alert network that uses a mobile app to connect potential victims with nearby help in real-time, including trained volunteers and professionals	7.25 (8.00)	6.66 (7.00)
Workshops for women teaching them about their rights and instilling self-respect	7.15 (8.00)	6.78 (7.00)
Open-Source Gender Equality Curriculum developed collaboratively by educators and made available for free to schools	7.16 (8.00)	6.31 (6.00)
School-Based Peer Counselling Programs where students are trained to provide support and referral services	6.93 (7.00)	6.34 (7.00)
Data-Driven Advocacy Workshops to teach community leaders how to effectively use gender data to advocate for policy changes	6.62 (7.00)	5.73 (5.00)
Gender Relations Simulator — an educational tool that simulates different gender dynamics and outcomes based on user decisions	6.18 (6.00)	5.58 (5.00)

Figure 8: Most effective gender-based violence interventions



Further demographic differences emerge with Non-White/EU women preferring school-based peer counselling programs, and women with annual incomes less than AUD \$52, 000 preferring data-driven advocacy workshops and an open-source gender equality curriculum.

5.3.1.4 GBV Risk Profile

YWA developed an original scale - GBV Risk Profile - in collaboration with men's behavioural change practitioners, to create a risk profile for GBV perpetration. It measures the presence and prevalence of negative psychological traits and life instability in male respondents. Analysis reveals strong correlations between YWA's original scale and self-reported GBV perpetration. These correlations are stronger than those between the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI)¹³⁶ and GBV perpetration, a validated and widely studied scale in academia. Accordingly, YWA's scale could help identify individuals at risk of perpetrating GBV, and thus inform preventive measures, such as targeted policy deployment, against GBV.

The comparison of GBV Risk Profiles between men in city areas and those in remote or regional areas has been conducted, revealing significant differences. Men living in remote or regional areas are more likely to feel overwhelmed in stressful situations and have past relationship issues affect their current relationships. They also show a higher prevalence of disorganised personal and professional lives,

¹³⁶ Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) is a 22-item measure for identifying sexist perceptions, attitudes, and opinions.

disbelief in gender equality, and being bothered when a partner wants alone time. Conversely, men in cities are more likely to fear losing their job.

Table 9 focuses on moderate GBV risk profiles, defined as scoring 6-10 on a 10-point scale. Table 10 examines high GBV risk profiles, identified by scores of 8-10 on the same 10-point scale.

Table 9: Prevalence of Moderate GBV Risk Profile Traits

Prevalence of Moderate GBV Risk Profile Traits (6-10 points out of 10) in Men	Area (current)	
	City	Remote/Regional
Blame Themselves for Problems	60.3%	68.4%
Overwhelmed in Stressful Situations	57.7%	80.8%
Fear of Losing Job	60.7%	38.4%
Past Relationship Issues Affect Current Ones	51.5%	71.2%
Need to Always Appear Strong and in Control	53.7%	51.6%
Hard to Move on After Relationship Ends	50.3%	43.3%
Mental Health Challenges Interfere with Daily Life	44.8%	39.5%
Jealous of Friends Success	40.3%	43.8%
Hard to See Woman/s Side in Disagreements	32.8%	40.7%
Stay Angry for a Long Time	34.2%	31.2%
Feel Unfairly Judged When Corrected	34.3%	21.7%
Bothered When Partner Wants Alone Time	29.9%	10.7%
Use Alcohol to Cope with Stress	26.1%	21.9%
Disorganised Personal and Professional Life	22.6%	43.9%

Use Drugs to Cope with Stress	22.9%	28.3%
Unstable Living Situation	22.1%	26.6%
Disbelief in Gender Equality	10.5%	27.5%
Unwilling to Share Household Responsibilities	9.6%	18.0%

(*Note: Mean (Median))

Figure 9: Prevalence of Moderate GBV Risk Profile Traits by location

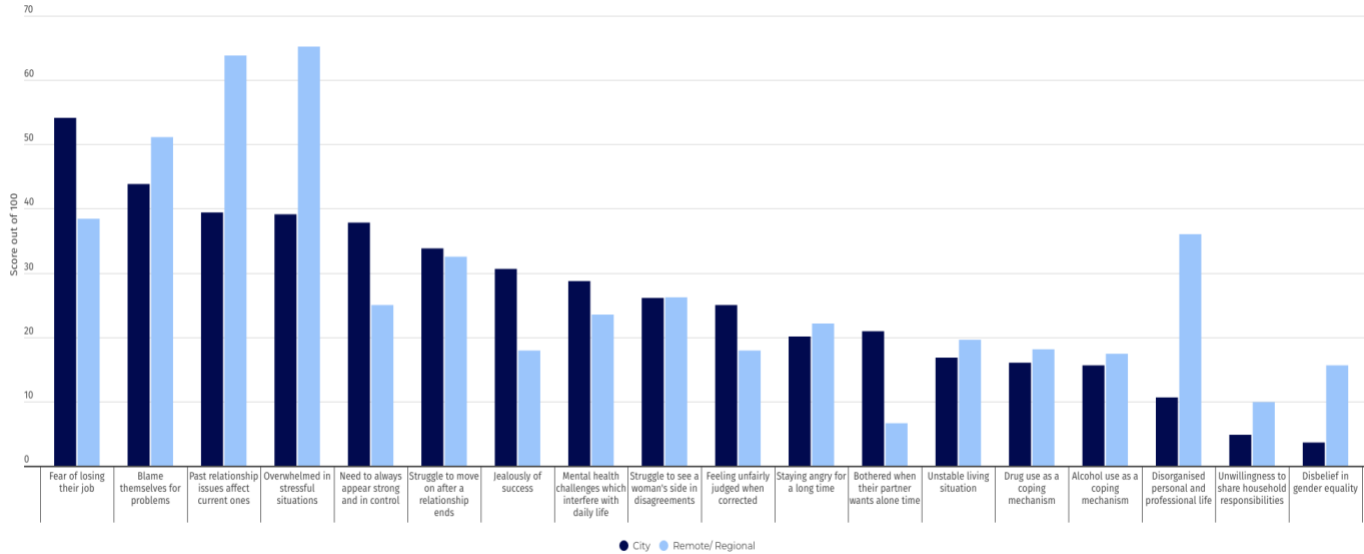


Table 10: Prevalence of High Expression of GBV Risk Profile Traits

Prevalence of High GBV Risk Profile Traits (8-10 points out of 10) in Men	Area (current)	
	City	Remote/Regional
Fear of Losing Job	54.1%	38.4%
Blame Themselves for Problems	43.8%	51.1%
Past Relationship Issues Affect Current Ones	39.4%	63.8%
Overwhelmed in Stressful Situations	39.1%	65.2%
Need to Always Appear Strong and in Control	37.8%	25.0%
Hard to Move on After Relationship Ends	33.8%	32.5%
Jealous of Friends Success	30.6%	17.9%
Mental Health Challenges Interfere with Daily Life	28.7%	23.5%
Hard to See Woman/s Side in Disagreements	26.1%	26.2%
Feel Unfairly Judged When Corrected	25.0%	17.9%
Stay Angry for a Long Time	20.1%	22.1%
Bothered When Partner Wants Alone Time	20.9%	6.6%
Unstable Living Situation	16.8%	19.6%
Use Drugs to Cope with Stress	16.0%	18.1%

Use Alcohol to Cope with Stress	15.6%	17.4%
Disorganised Personal and Professional Life	10.6%	36.0%
Unwilling to Share Household Responsibilities	4.8%	9.9%
Disbelief in Gender Equality	3.6%	15.6%

(*Note: Mean (Median))

5.3.1.5 Original Time Progressions of GBV

YWA completed original time progression analysis¹³⁷ of GBV perpetration and exposure, revealing experiences in various life areas that correlate with increased risk. By understanding these key correlations, interventions can be precisely targeted to reduce GBV risk.

GBV Perpetration

This section explores positive and negative correlations between experiences in various life areas and young men’s GBV perpetration.

Family/Friends

GBV Perpetration Correlations:

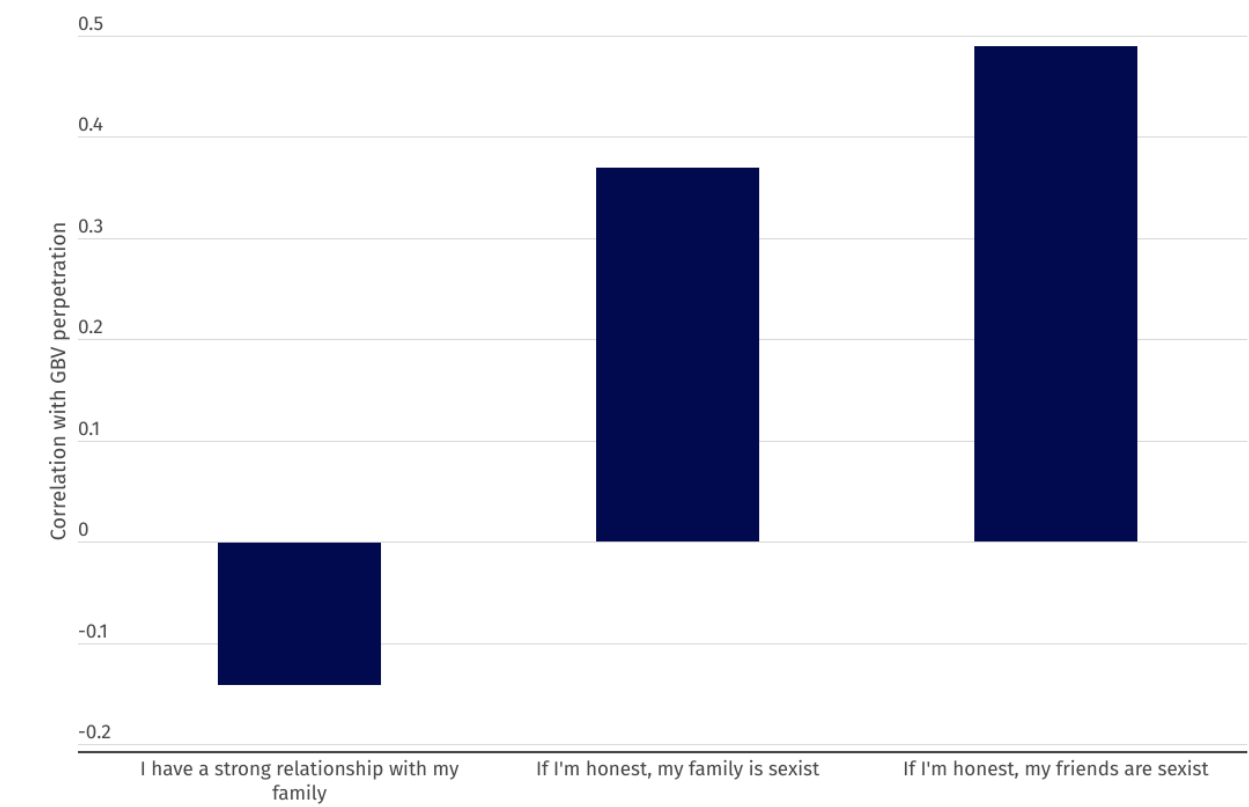
- If I'm honest, my family is sexist
- If I'm honest, my friends are sexist
- I have a strong relationship with my family

Sexist attitudes within family and social circles reinforce harmful gender norms and contribute to GBV. Addressing these attitudes requires targeted interventions that promote gender equality within these close-knit groups. Family therapy sessions can help members understand and dismantle ingrained sexist beliefs, fostering a more supportive family dynamic. Community-based programmes can facilitate discussions on gender equality, providing a space for individuals to challenge and change their views. Encouraging open conversations about gender roles and responsibilities within families and friendship groups can lead to a gradual shift in attitudes, reducing the risk of GBV. Notably, having a strong relationship with one's

¹³⁷ Time progression analysis refers to how certain variables or conditions progress over time; in this case, GBV perpetration risk as respondents progress through life areas.

family negatively correlates with GBV perpetration, demonstrating the importance of supportive family dynamics in teaching men non-violent emotional regulation.

Figure 10: Correlation between Attitudes of Friends/Family and GBV Perpetration (Men)



Health

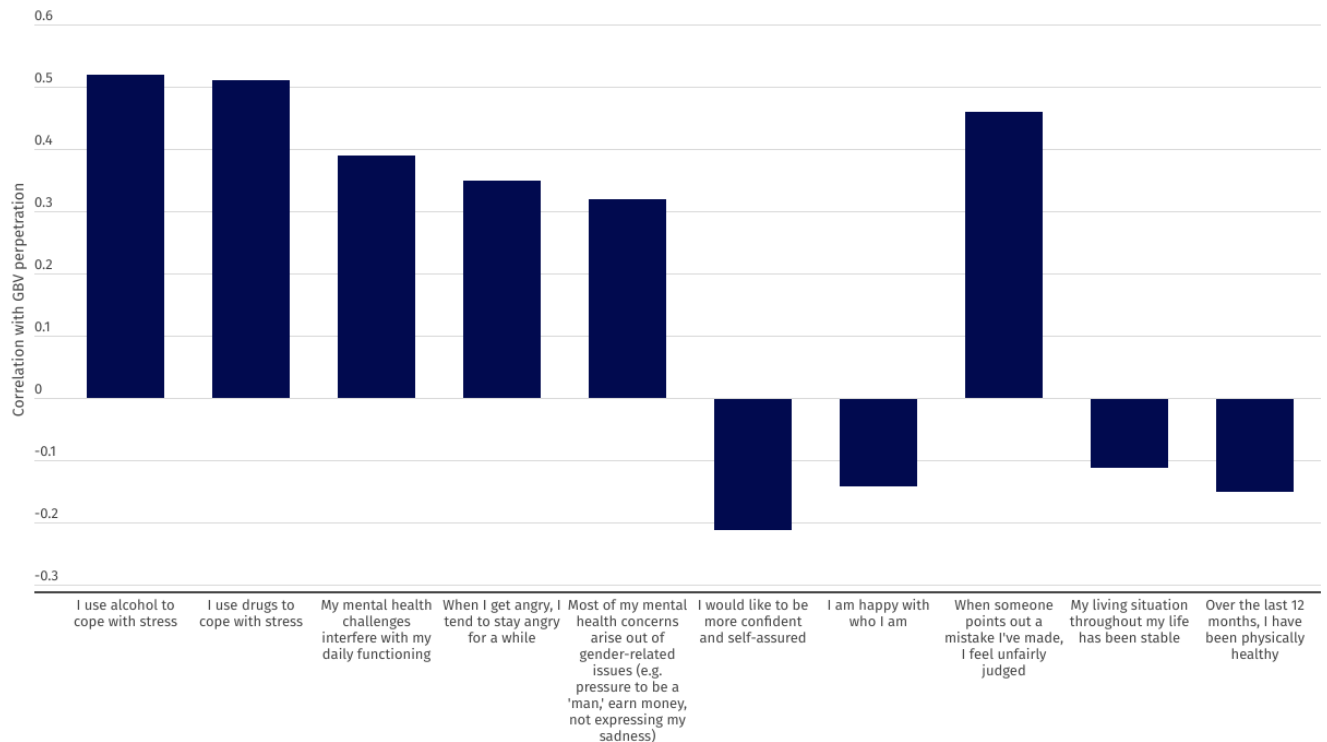
GBV Perpetration Correlations:

- I use alcohol to cope with stress
- I use drugs to cope with stress
- My mental health challenges interfere with my daily functioning
- When I get angry, I tend to stay angry for a while
- Most of my mental health concerns arise out of gender-related issues
- I would like to be more confident and self-assured
- I am happy with who I am
- When someone points out a mistake I've made, I feel unfairly judged
- My living situation throughout my life has been stable
- Over the last 12 months, I have been physically healthy

Mental health distress among men stems from societal pressures to conform to traditional masculine roles, leading to unhealthy coping mechanisms such as substance abuse. Interventions should focus on providing gender-sensitive mental health services that address these specific pressures. This includes

creating support groups where men can discuss their challenges without fear of judgement, and offering workshops on healthy coping strategies. Workplace initiatives, such as mental health days and stress management programmes, can also alleviate mental health issues by providing employees with tools and time to manage their stress effectively. The negative correlation with being physically healthy over the last year suggests that physical well-being is associated with lower GBV perpetration, highlighting the importance of holistic health approaches in these interventions.

Figure 11: Correlation between Mental & Physical Health and GBV Perpetration (Men)



Education & Financial Education

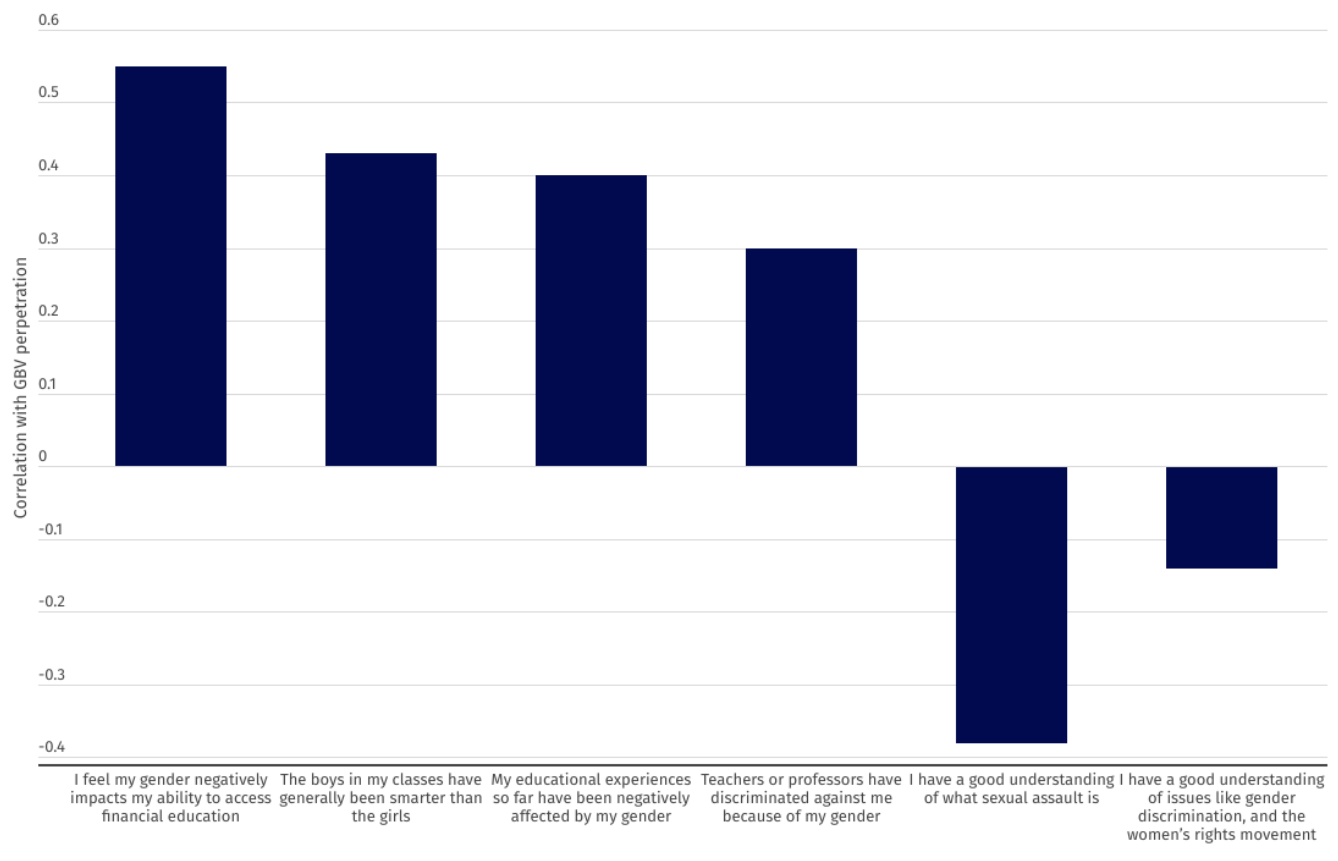
GBV Perpetration Correlations:

- I feel my gender negatively impacts my ability to access financial education
- The boys in my classes have generally been smarter than the girls
- My educational experiences so far have been negatively affected by my gender
- Teachers or professors have discriminated against me because of my gender
- I have a good understanding of what sexual assault is
- I have a good understanding of issues like gender discrimination, and the women's rights movement

Educational environments perpetuate gender biases that significantly affect students' academic experiences. The belief that boys are generally smarter than girls can lead to diminished self-esteem and academic performance among female students. Teachers' gender discrimination further exacerbates these disparities. Interventions should include mandatory training for educators to recognise and address their

biases, thus creating a more equitable classroom environment. Integrating gender studies into the curriculum can help students understand the historical and social contexts of gender discrimination, fostering critical thinking and empathy. Having a good understanding of issues like gender discrimination and the women’s rights movement correlates negatively with GBV perpetration. Hence, education is a powerful tool in reducing GBV.

Figure 12: Correlation between Education & Financial Education and GBV Perpetration (Men)



Relationships

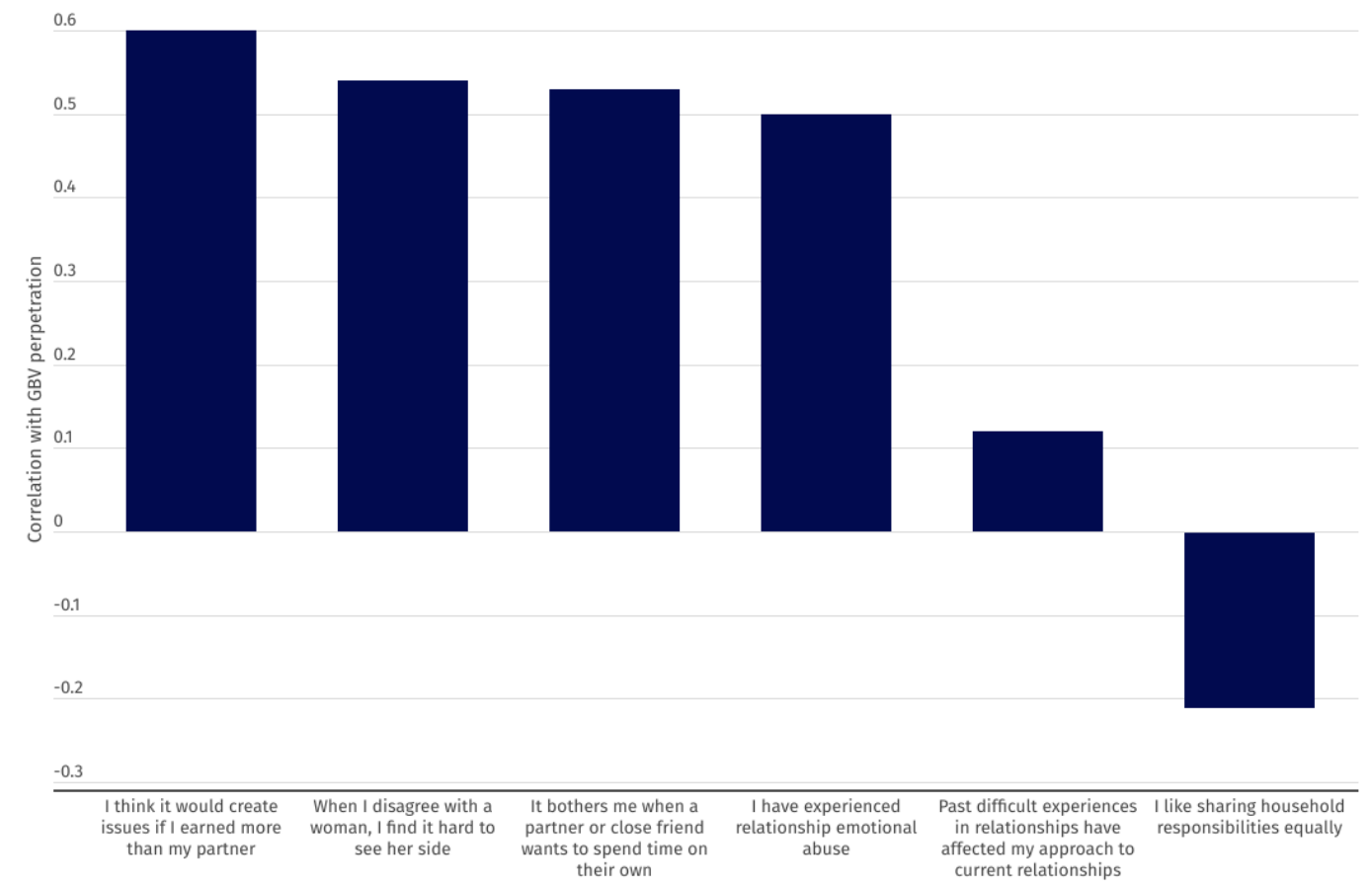
GBV Perpetration Correlations:

- I think it would create issues if I earned more than my partner
- When I disagree with a woman, I find it hard to see her side
- It bothers me when a partner or close friend wants to spend time on their own
- I have experienced relationship emotional abuse
- Past difficult experiences in relationships have affected my approach to current relationships
- I like sharing household responsibilities equally

Power imbalances and poor communication in relationships are significant risk factors for GBV. The concern about earning more than a partner and difficulty in understanding a woman's perspective during

disagreements highlight entrenched gender norms. Interventions should focus on promoting equality within relationships, including financial equity and shared responsibilities. Relationship counselling and educational programs on conflict resolution and empathy can help couples navigate these issues more constructively. The negative correlation with enjoying equal household responsibilities suggests that fostering a sense of partnership and shared duties can mitigate GBV risk. Addressing past relationship traumas and providing support for those experiencing emotional abuse can also help individuals form healthier, more respectful relationships.

Figure 13: Correlation between Relationship Experiences and GBV Perpetration (Men)



Sex

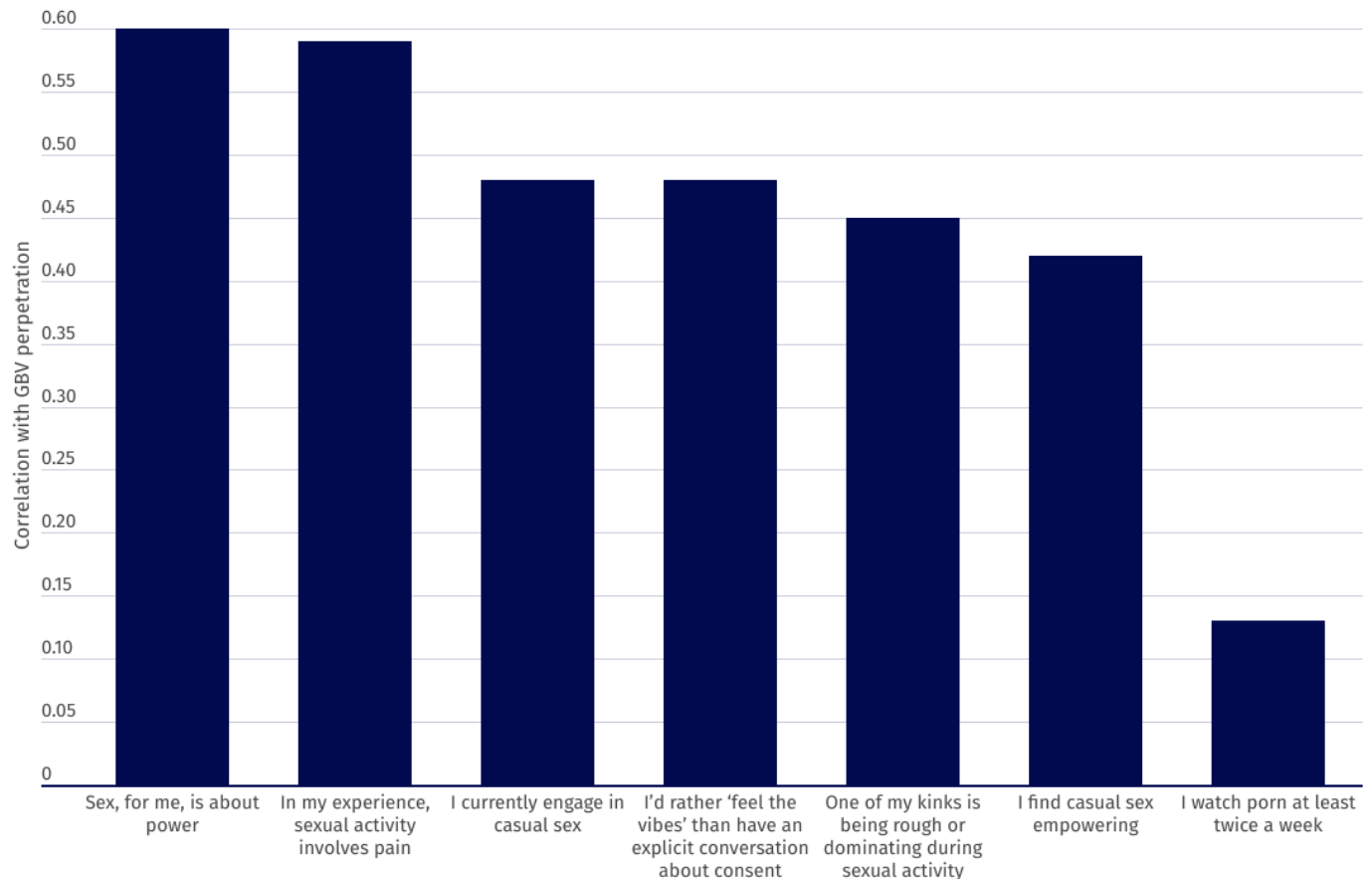
GBV Perpetration Correlations:

- Sex, for me, is about power
- In my experience, sexual activity involves pain
- I currently engage in casual sex
- I'd rather 'feel the vibes' than have an explicit conversation about consent
- One of my kinks is being rough or dominating during sexual activity
- I find casual sex empowering

- I watch porn at least twice a week

The correlations between perceptions of sex and GBV perpetration reveal areas for intervention. The belief that sex is about power and the preference for non-explicit consent suggest that many individuals may not fully understand or respect the concept of mutual consent. Comprehensive sex education that emphasises explicit and enthusiastic consent, respectful sexual practices, and the potential for harm in certain kinks can mitigate these issues. Additionally, addressing the normalisation of pain during sex and frequent pornography consumption can help individuals form healthier sexual attitudes and behaviours, ultimately reducing GBV.

Figure 14: Correlation between Perceptions & Experiences of Sex and GBV Perpetration (Men)



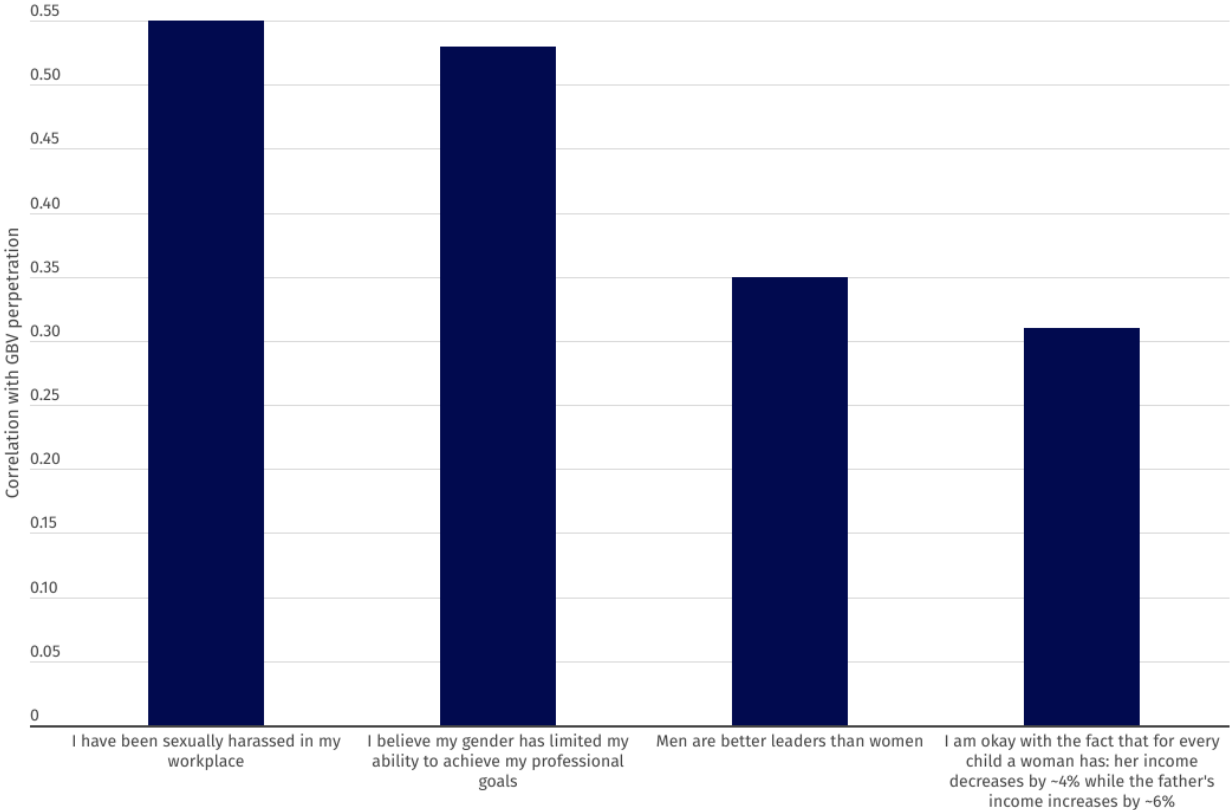
Career

GBV Perpetration Correlations:

- I have been sexually harassed in my workplace
- I believe my gender has limited my ability to achieve my professional goals
- Men are better leaders than women
- I am okay with the fact that for every child a woman has: her income decreases by ~4% while the father's income increases by ~6%

Workplace harassment and gender discrimination hinder professional growth and contribute to a hostile work environment. Interventions should include the enforcement of strict anti-harassment policies and the establishment of clear reporting mechanisms. Providing equal access to financial education and professional development opportunities can help bridge gender gaps in career progression. Mentorship programmes that pair experienced professionals with those facing gender-based challenges can offer guidance and support, helping to navigate and overcome these barriers. Promoting transparency in hiring and promotion practices ensures that all employees have equal opportunities to advance based on merit. These steps can reduce the systemic issues that contribute to GBV in professional settings.

Figure 15: Correlation between Career experiences and GBV Perpetration (Men)



Indexes

GBV Perpetration Correlations:

- Personal and Mental Health Distress Score
- Gender and Sexuality-Related Distress Score
- Gender Bias Index
- Gender and Relationship Distress Score 6+

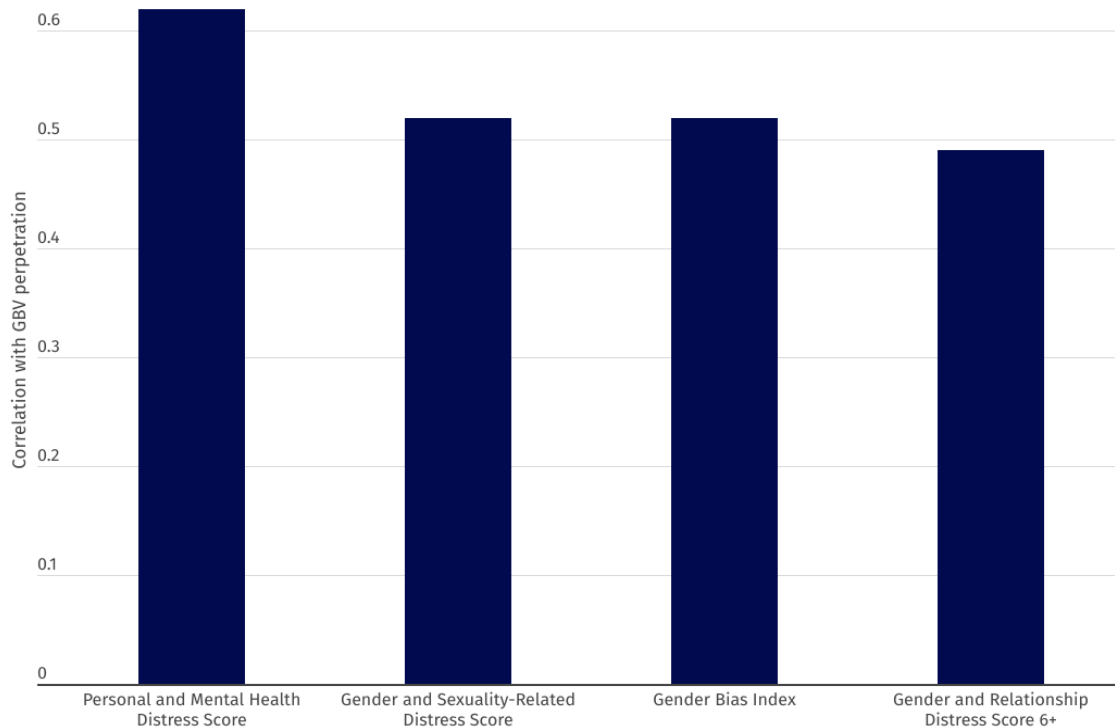
High scores on distress and bias indexes indicate significant areas for targeted interventions. Personal and mental health distress and gender-related distress suggest that individuals experiencing these issues may

be more likely to perpetrate GBV. Comprehensive mental health services that address gender-specific challenges can help alleviate these distress factors. The Gender Bias Index and Gender and Relationship Distress Score clarify the need for educational interventions which challenge harmful gender norms. Promoting egalitarian views and reducing gender-based distress through community support programs can be effective strategies for lowering GBV risk.

Overall, the data reveals that sexist attitudes and beliefs among males often form early in life, particularly through educational experiences where boys are perceived as smarter and gender discrimination by teachers is common. These early experiences contribute to entrenched gender biases and power dynamics that manifest in later behaviours. Men who view sex as a power dynamic and who struggle with explicit communication around consent are significantly more likely to perpetrate GBV. Additionally, mental health distress, influenced by societal pressures to conform to traditional masculine roles and the use of unhealthy coping mechanisms such as alcohol and drugs, is a critical factor in GBV perpetration. Workplace environments where sexual harassment and gender discrimination are prevalent further exacerbate these behaviours, reinforcing negative attitudes towards women.

Interventions should focus on addressing these issues through comprehensive sex education that emphasises consent and respect, mental health support tailored to address gender-specific challenges, and strict anti-harassment policies in professional settings. Notably, the data shows that having a good understanding of issues like gender discrimination, sexual assault, and the women’s rights movement, enjoying equal household responsibilities, and being physically healthy all correlate negatively with GBV perpetration. This indicates that education on gender issues, fostering egalitarian views, and promoting overall well-being can significantly reduce GBV perpetration.

Figure 16: Correlation between YWA Index scores and GBV Perpetration (Men)



GBV Exposure

This section explores positive and negative correlations between experiences in various life areas and young women's GBV exposure.

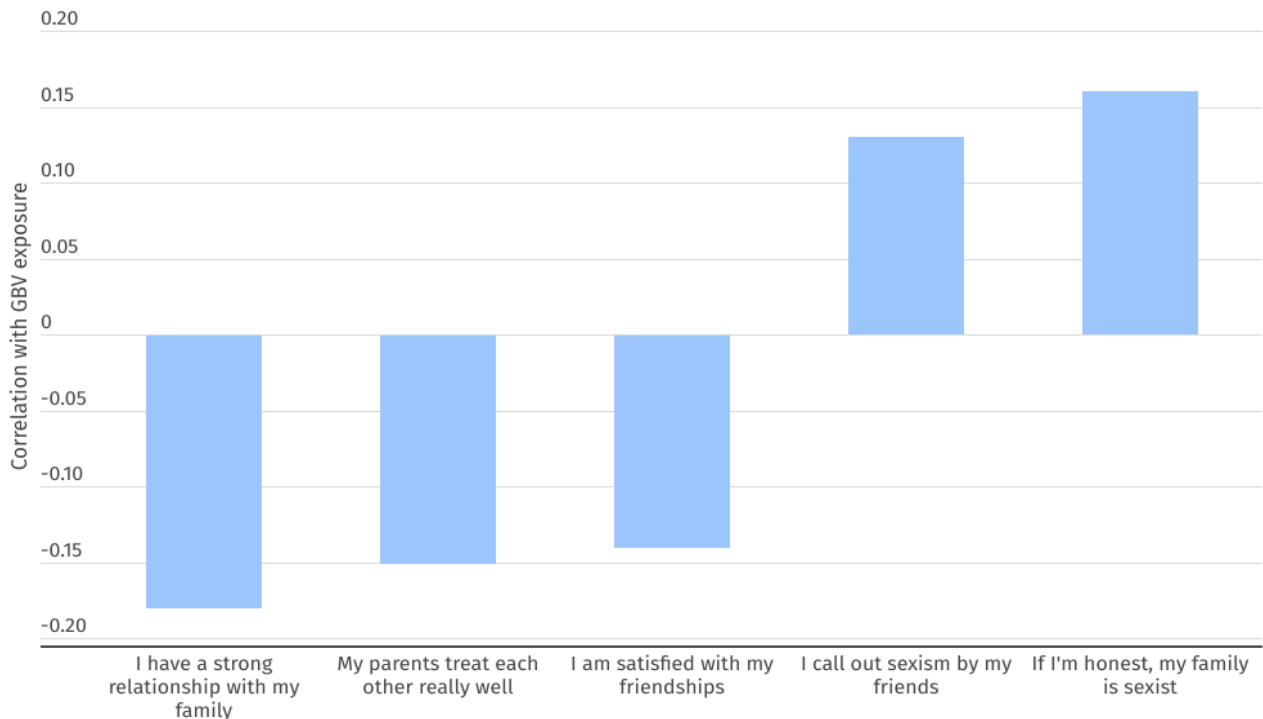
Family/Friends

GBV Exposure Correlations:

- I have a strong relationship with my family
- My parents treat each other really well
- I am satisfied with my friendships
- I call out sexism by my friends
- If I'm honest, my family is sexist

Strong, supportive relationships with family and friends are crucial in reducing GBV exposure. Positive family dynamics and satisfaction with friendships provide emotional support that acts as a buffer against GBV. Calling out sexism among friends indicates an active stance against harmful behaviours, which can create a more respectful social environment. However, the presence of sexism within families must be addressed. Family therapy and community programmes that address and challenge sexist attitudes can foster healthier relationships and reduce GBV exposure. Encouraging open discussions about gender roles and responsibilities within families and friendships can lead to meaningful changes in attitudes and behaviours.

Figure 17: Correlation between Attitudes of Family/Friends and GBV Exposure (Women)



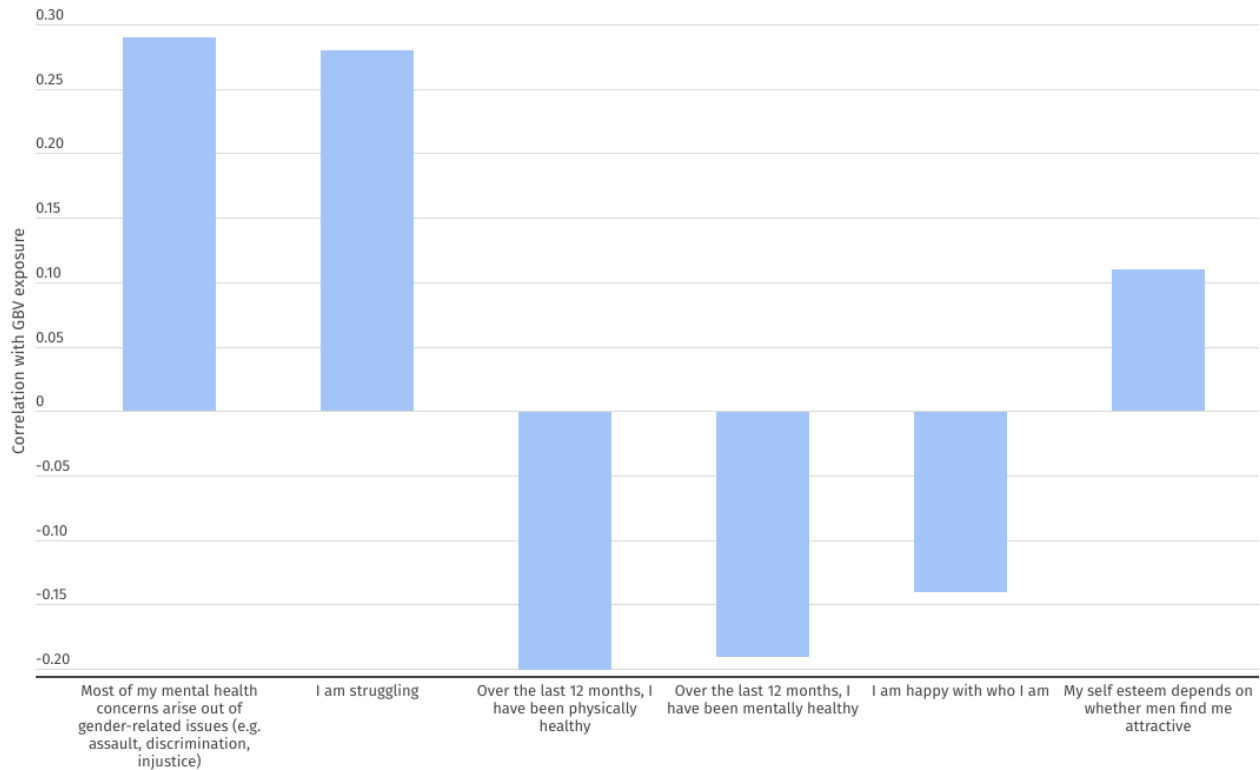
Health

GBV Exposure Correlations:

- Most of my mental health concerns arise out of gender-related issues (e.g. assault, discrimination, injustice)
- I am struggling
- Over the last 12 months, I have been physically healthy
- Over the last 12 months, I have been mentally healthy
- I am happy with who I am
- My self-esteem depends on whether men find me attractive

Mental health concerns arising from gender-related issues like assault and discrimination significantly increase vulnerability to GBV. The struggle with mental health, self-esteem tied to male validation, and physical health highlight the complex interplay between mental and physical well-being and GBV exposure. Gender-sensitive mental health services that address these specific challenges are crucial. Providing support groups, therapy, and workshops on self-esteem and resilience can help individuals manage their mental health more effectively. The negative correlation with being physically and mentally healthy suggests that holistic health approaches are essential for reducing GBV exposure.

Figure 18: Correlation between Mental & Physical Health and GBV Exposure (Women)



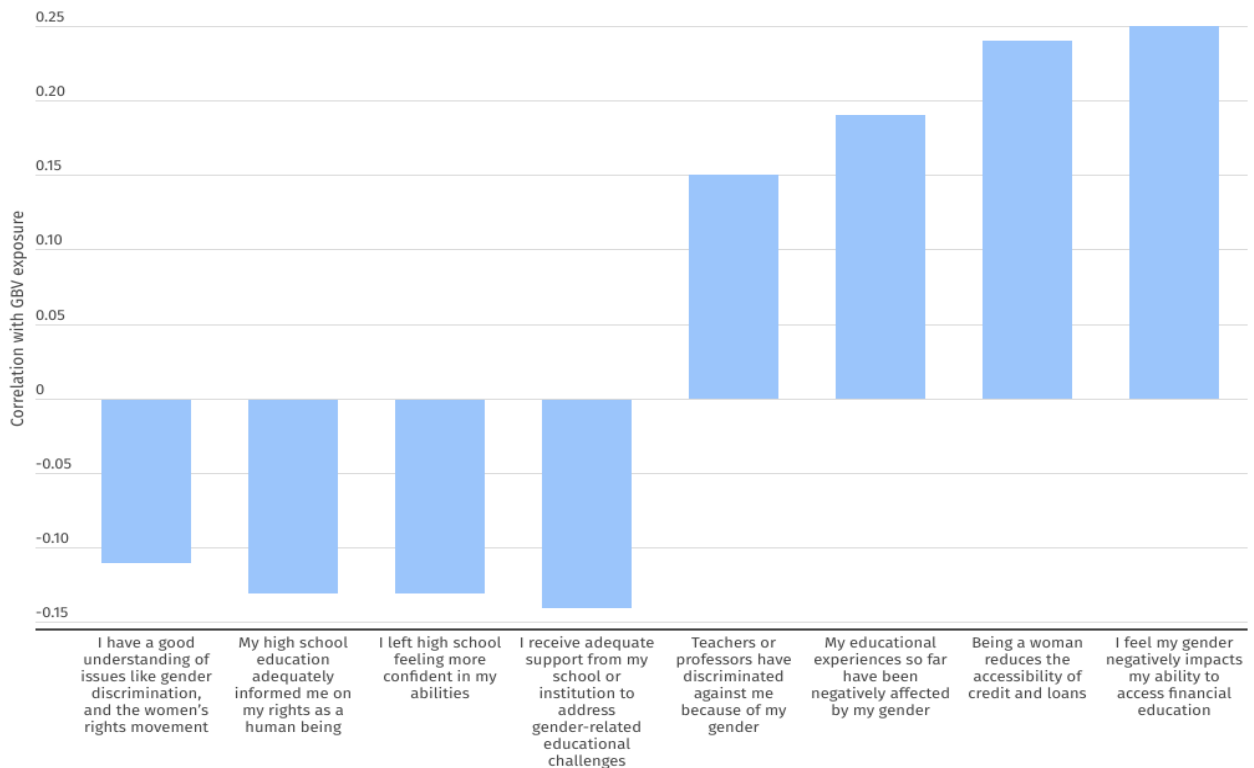
Education & Financial Education

GBV Exposure Correlations:

- I have a good understanding of issues like gender discrimination, and the women’s rights movement
- My high school education adequately informed me on my rights as a human being
- I left high school feeling more confident in my abilities
- I receive adequate support from my school or institution to address gender-related educational challenges
- Teachers or professors have discriminated against me because of my gender
- My educational experiences so far have been negatively affected by my gender
- Being a woman reduces the accessibility of credit and loans
- I feel my gender negatively impacts my ability to access financial education

Educational environments significantly affect GBV exposure. Understanding issues like gender discrimination and women's rights is associated with reduced GBV exposure, highlighting the importance of comprehensive gender education. Negative educational experiences due to gender discrimination by teachers indicate the need for mandatory training to address biases and create supportive learning environments. Ensuring that students feel informed about their rights and confident in their abilities can mitigate the impact of gender-based educational challenges. Addressing financial education barriers and credit accessibility for women is also crucial for reducing economic vulnerabilities to GBV.

Figure 19: Correlation between Education & Financial Education and GBV Exposure (Women)



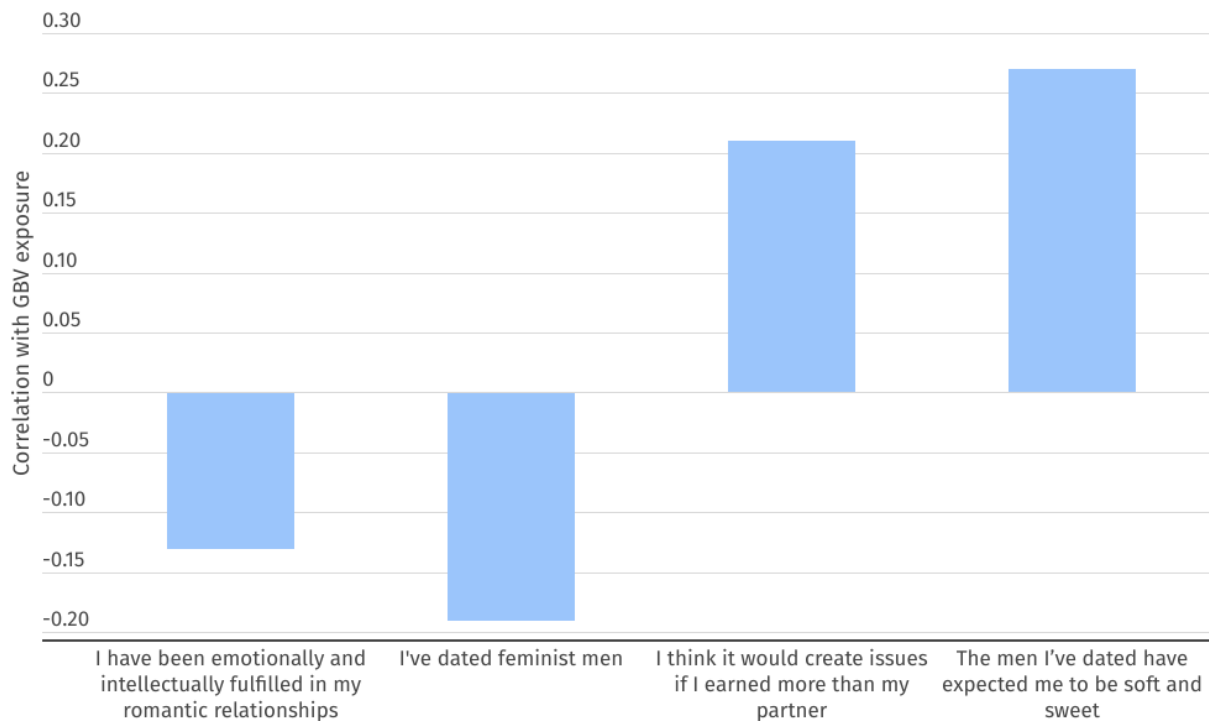
Relationships

GBV Exposure Correlations:

- I have been emotionally and intellectually fulfilled in my romantic relationships
- The men I've dated have been feminists
- I think it would create issues if I earned more than my partner
- The men I've dated have expected me to be soft and sweet

Fulfilment in romantic relationships and dating feminist men are associated with reduced GBV exposure, demonstrating the importance of equal and respectful partnerships. Conversely, concerns about earning more than a partner and expectations of being 'soft and sweet' highlight entrenched gender norms that increase GBV vulnerability. Interventions should promote equality within relationships. Relationship education programmes that challenge traditional gender roles and encourage supportive, feminist partnerships can help individuals form healthier and more respectful relationships, reducing their exposure to GBV.

Figure 20: Correlation between Relationship Experiences and GBV Exposure (Women)



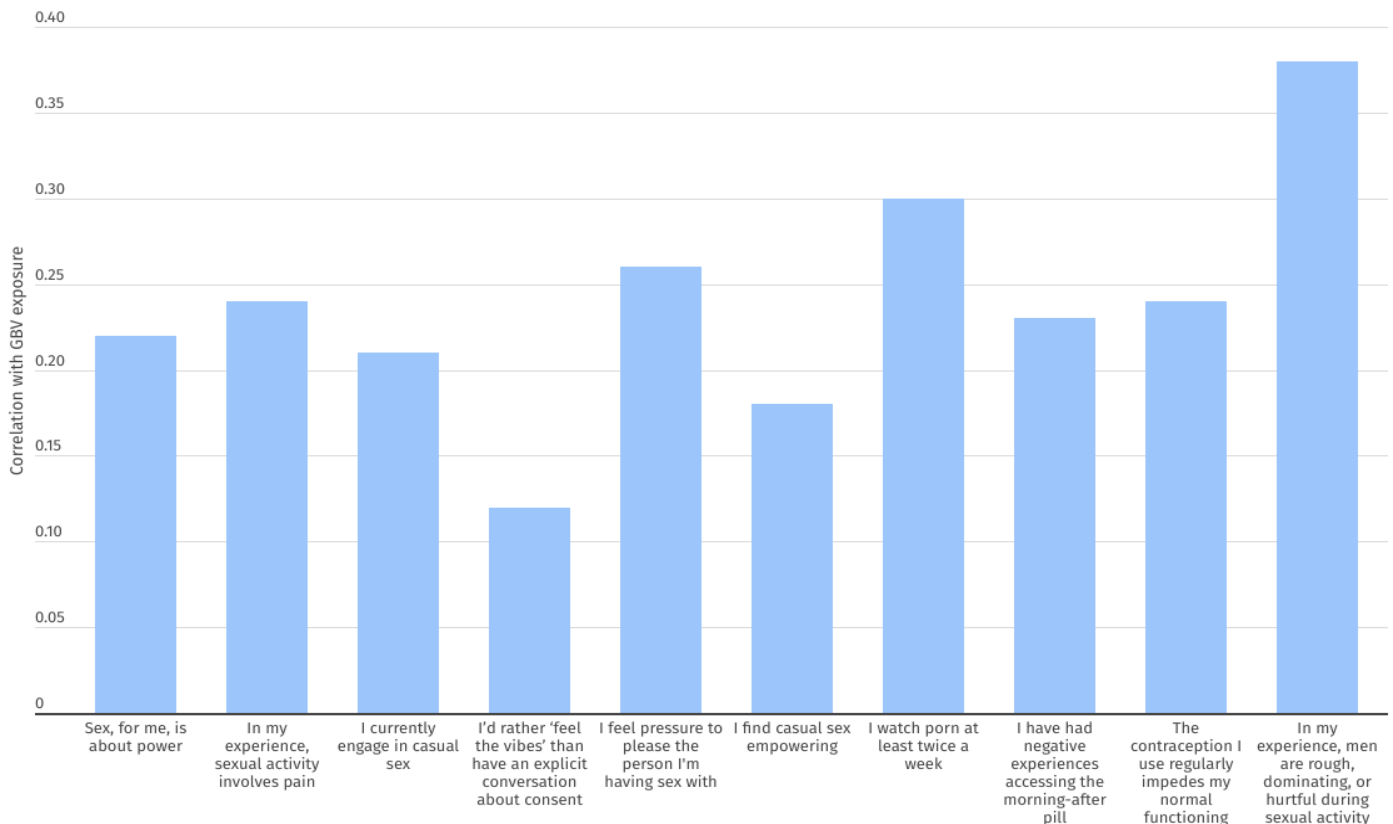
Sex

GBV Exposure Correlations:

- Sex, for me, is about power
- In my experience, sexual activity involves pain
- I currently engage in casual sex
- I'd rather 'feel the vibes' than have an explicit conversation about consent
- I feel pressure to please the person I'm having sex with
- I find casual sex empowering
- I watch porn at least twice a week
- I have had negative experiences accessing the morning-after pill
- The contraception I use regularly impedes my normal functioning
- In my experience, men are rough, dominating, or hurtful during sexual activity

The correlations between sexual experiences and GBV exposure highlight several areas for intervention. The belief that sex is about power and the experience of pain during sexual activity indicate a lack of mutual respect and consent. Comprehensive sex education that emphasises explicit consent, respectful practices, and sexual assertiveness can help mitigate these issues. The pressure to please sexual partners and negative experiences with contraception further exacerbate vulnerability to GBV. Providing resources for better sexual health management and ensuring access to emergency contraception can reduce these risks. Addressing the normalisation of rough or dominating behaviour during sex is also crucial for fostering healthy sexual relationships.

Figure 21: Correlation between Perceptions & Experiences of Sex and GBV Exposure (Women)



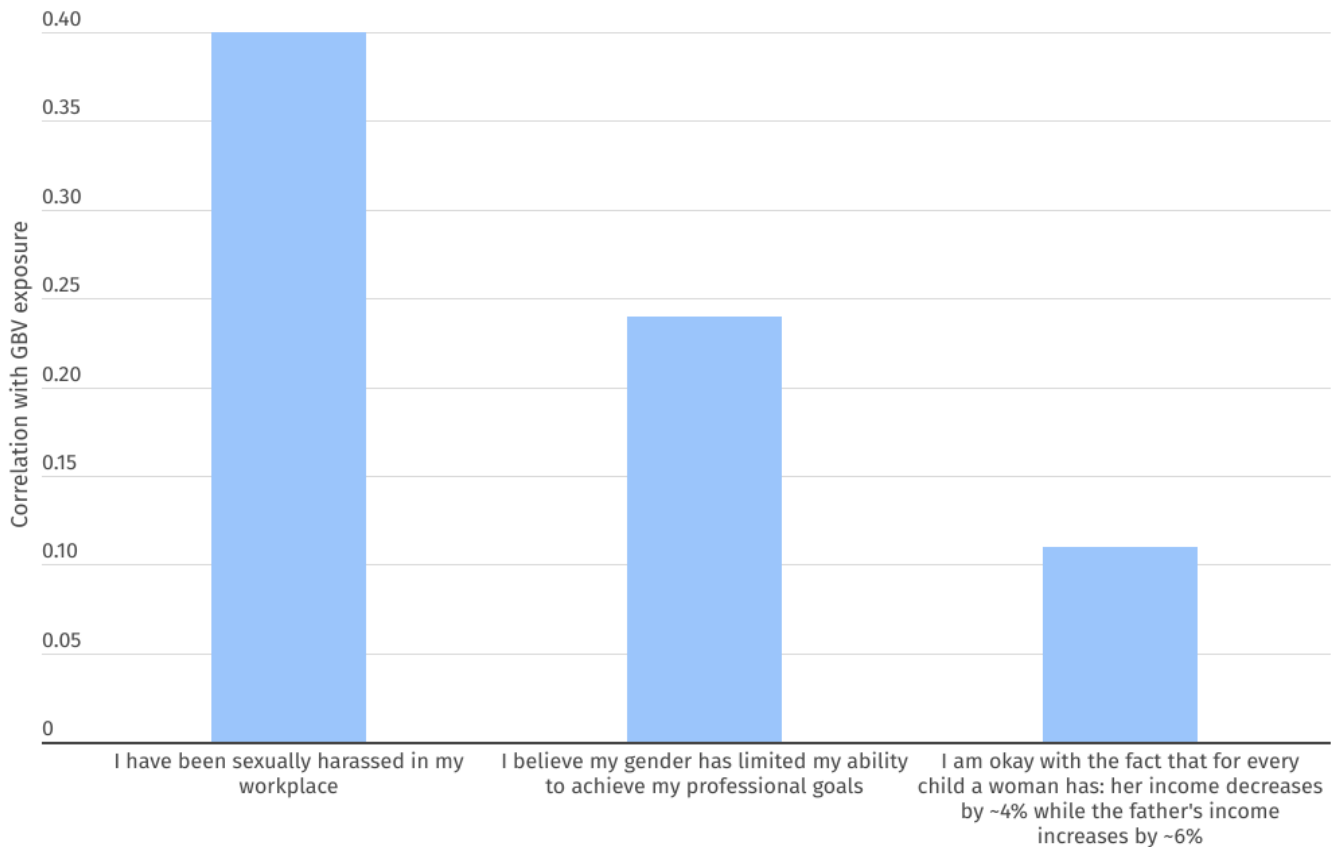
Career

GBV Exposure Correlations:

- I have been sexually harassed in my workplace
- I believe my gender has limited my ability to achieve my professional goals
- I am okay with the fact that for every child a woman has: her income decreases by ~4% while the father's income increases by ~6%

Workplace harassment and gender discrimination significantly increase exposure to GBV. Experiences of sexual harassment and perceived limitations on professional growth due to gender highlight the need for robust workplace policies. Implementing strict anti-harassment measures and transparent reporting mechanisms, with actionable change embedded, can create safer work environments. Equal access to professional development opportunities and addressing income disparities related to parenthood can help reduce gender-based vulnerabilities.

Figure 22: Correlation between Career Experiences and GBV Exposure (Women)



Indexes

GBV Exposure Correlations:

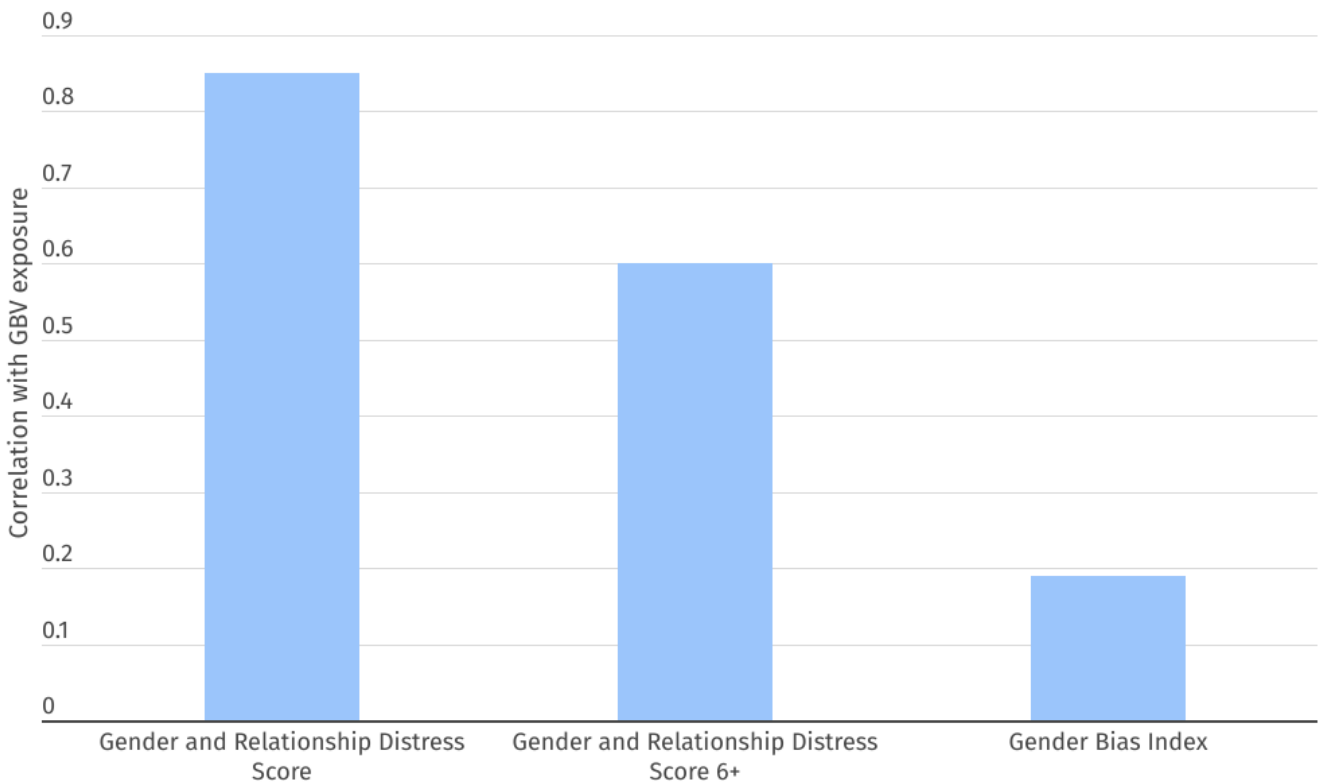
- Gender and Relationship Distress Score
- Gender and Relationship Distress Score 6+
- Gender Bias Index

High scores on distress and bias indexes are symptomatic of vulnerability to GBV exposure. The Gender and Relationship Distress Scores suggest that individuals experiencing high levels of distress in these areas are more likely to be exposed to GBV. These correlations underscore the importance of comprehensive support services addressing relationship and gender-specific challenges. The Gender Bias Index highlights how pervasive gender biases contribute to GBV exposure, necessitating educational campaigns which challenge and ultimately change harmful gender norms. Reducing gender-based distress through community support programmes and promoting egalitarian views can be effective strategies for lowering GBV exposure.

Overall, the data indicates that women are particularly vulnerable to GBV exposure due to pervasive gender biases and discriminatory practices encountered from a young age within educational and professional environments. Negative experiences with contraception and emergency contraception access, along with the expectation to please sexual partners, increase their vulnerability during sexual activities. Emotional and intellectual fulfilment in relationships and dating feminist partners serve as protective factors against GBV exposure, highlighting the importance of equitable and supportive romantic relationships. Conversely, mental health struggles linked to gender-related issues, such as assault and discrimination, and self-esteem tied to male approval significantly heighten the risk of GBV exposure. The presence of sexist attitudes within family and social circles further reinforces harmful gender norms.

Receiving accurate and detailed education on sex positively correlates with women's physical health, mental health, and self-esteem. Detailed education on consent correlates with physical health and self-satisfaction. Additionally, feeling adequately informed about reproductive health correlates with happiness with oneself. These educational factors are also linked to emotional and intellectual fulfilment in romantic relationships and comfort in discussing sexism and gender issues with partners. Comprehensive sexual education that addresses consent and healthy sexual practices, robust support systems in schools and workplaces, and initiatives to challenge and change sexist attitudes within families and communities are crucial for reducing GBV exposure.

Figure 23: Correlation between YWA Index Scores and GBV Exposure (Women)



5.3.1.6 Correlations Among Composite Scores of Male Attitudes and Behaviour

YWA created the following scales to examine GBV in our primary research methods:

GBV Exposure Scale

The composite GBV Exposure Score is the average of the following 10-point scale items:

- I have experienced relationship violence
- I have experienced relationship emotional abuse
- I have experienced relationship financial abuse
- I have excused or accepted abuse because of love.

GBV Perpetration Scale

The composite GBV Perpetration Score is the average of the following 10-point scale items:

- I have been physically or sexually abusive to my partner
- I have been emotionally or financially abusive to my partner
- I have raped someone
- I have sexually assaulted someone
- I have sexually harassed someone

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI)

The Benevolent and Hostile Sexism Scores are constructed based on responses to a series of statements reflecting two distinct types of sexism. Each statement is rated on a 5-point Likert scale from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (5). The scores are calculated by taking the mean of the responses to the respective statements, with higher scores indicating higher levels of sexism.

The Benevolent Sexism Score is calculated from the following statements:

- Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores
- Men are incomplete without women
- Women should be cherished and protected by men
- Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess
- Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility
- Men should be willing to sacrifice their well-being in order to provide financially for the women in their lives

These statements reflect traditional, paternalistic attitudes towards women, often idealising them as pure and morally superior, while reinforcing gender roles that emphasise male protection and provision.

The Hostile Sexism Score is calculated from the following statements:

- When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against
- Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash
- Women exaggerate problems they have at work
- Women seek to gain power by getting control over men
- Feminists are making unreasonable demands of men
- Many women get a kick out of teasing men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances

These statements reflect antagonistic attitudes towards women, suggesting that women manipulate, exaggerate, or seek to dominate men, and that feminist demands are unreasonable.

The overall Benevolent and Hostile Sexism scores are computed by averaging the responses to the respective sets of statements to produce an overall Ambivalent Sexism score.

Male Gender-Bias Index

The Male Gender-Bias Index is calculated based on responses to a series of statements reflecting gender biases. The index is created by taking the row-wise mean of the following statements:

- The boys in my classes have generally been smarter than the girls
- I believe incompetent women are regularly hired and/or promoted for diversity reasons -
- I am okay with the fact that for every child a woman has: her income decreases by ~4% while the father's income increases by ~6%

- Men are better leaders than women
- If I'm honest, my family is sexist
- If I'm honest, my friends are sexist

None of the statements are reverse scored. The index score is calculated by taking the average of the responses to these statements, allowing for a summary measure of gender biases among men.

Male Gender and Sexuality-Related Distress Score

The Male Gender and Sexuality-Related Distress Score is calculated based on responses to a series of statements reflecting distress related to gender and sexuality issues. The score is created by taking the row-wise mean of the following survey items:

- Over the last 12 months, I have been mentally healthy (reverse-scored)
- I have a good understanding of what sexual assault is (reverse-scored)
- Most of my mental health concerns arise out of gender-related issues (e.g. pressure to be a 'man,' earn money, not expressing my sadness)
- I am struggling
- Sex, for me, is about power
- One of my kinks is being rough or dominating during sexual activity
- I watch porn at least twice a week
- My romantic relationships so far have followed traditional gender roles
- The women I've dated have expected me to be strong and independent

The score is calculated by taking the average of the responses to these statements.

Female Gender and Relationship Distress Score

The Female Gender and Relationship Distress Score is calculated based on responses to a series of statements reflecting distress related to gender and relationship issues. The score is created by taking the row-wise mean of the following survey items:

High Responses (no reverse scaling)

- In my experience, sexual activity involves pain
- My romantic relationships so far have followed traditional gender roles
- The men I've dated have expected me to be soft and sweet
- I feel pressure to please the person I'm having sex with
- I have experienced relationship violence
- I have experienced relationship emotional abuse
- I have experienced relationship financial abuse
- I have excused or accepted abuse because of love

Low Responses (reverse scaling)

- I have felt comfortable discussing sexism and/or gender issues with the people I have dated

- It matters to me if a man is a feminist
- The men I've dated have been feminists
- I have been emotionally and intellectually fulfilled in my romantic relationships

The score is calculated by taking the average of the responses to these statements.

Male Personal and Mental Health Distress Score

The Male Personal and Mental Health Distress Score is calculated based on responses to a series of statements reflecting personal and mental health distress. The score is created by taking the row-wise mean of the following survey items:

High Responses (no reverse scaling)

- When someone points out a mistake I've made, I feel unfairly judged
- I believe it is important to always appear strong and in control
- When a friend succeeds at something I want, I feel jealous
- It bothers me when a partner or close friend wants to spend time on their own
- When I get angry, I tend to stay angry for a while
- When I disagree with a woman, I find it hard to see her side
- When a problem arises in my life, I blame myself
- In stressful situations, I feel overwhelmed
- Past difficult experiences in relationships have affected my approach to current relationships
- I use drugs to cope with stress
- I use alcohol to cope with stress
- My mental health challenges interfere with my daily functioning
- When a relationship ends, I find it hard to move on
- I couldn't bear to lose my job

Low Responses (reverse scaling)

- I like sharing household responsibilities equally
- I believe that men and women should have equal status in society
- My living situation throughout my life has been stable
- My personal and professional life are organised

A Spearman correlation matrix¹³⁸ highlights several significant relationships among these scales. The GBV Exposure Score shows a strong positive correlation with the GBV Perpetration Score and the Gender and Relationship Distress Score, indicating that higher exposure to GBV is associated with higher perpetration and relationship distress. It also has moderate correlations with Gender and Sexuality-Related Distress, Personal and Mental Health Distress, and Control and Abuse in Relationships scores.

¹³⁸ Spearman's rank correlation is a non-parametric measure of statistical dependence between the rankings of two variables. It assesses how well the relationship between two variables can be described using a monotonic function, which means that as one variable increases, the other variable tends to either increase or decrease consistently, but not necessarily at a constant rate.

The GBV Perpetration Score similarly shows strong correlations with Control and Abuse in Relationships and Gender and Relationship Distress scores, suggesting that those who perpetrate GBV are likely to have higher levels of control and abuse behaviours as well as relationship distress. It also has moderate correlations with Gender and Sexuality-Related Distress and Male Personal and Mental Health Distress Scores.

Hostile Sexism Score has moderate correlations with Benevolent Sexism Score and weak to moderate correlations with various distress scores, indicating that those with higher hostile sexist attitudes are likely to have higher benevolent sexist attitudes and experience more distress in different areas.

Benevolent Sexism Score shows moderate correlations with Hostile Sexism Score and weaker correlations with distress scores, suggesting a connection between benevolent sexist attitudes and other forms of distress, albeit weaker than that seen with hostile sexism.

Male Gender and Sexuality-Related Distress Score exhibits strong correlations with Gender and Relationship Distress and Male Personal and Mental Health Distress Scores, indicating a significant overlap in the distress experienced in these areas. It also has moderate correlations with Control and Abuse in Relationships and FDSV-related scores.

Gender and Relationship Distress Score has strong correlations with most other distress and GBV scores, reflecting the extensive impact of relationship distress on various psychological and behavioural traits.

Male Personal and Mental Health Distress Score shows strong correlations with other distress scores and moderate correlations with sexism scores, highlighting the interconnectedness of mental health with sexism and relationship dynamics.

Control and Abuse in Relationships Score has strong correlations with GBV Perpetration and Gender and Relationship Distress scores, indicating a significant association between control/abuse behaviours and these areas. It also has moderate correlations with various distress and sexism scores.

Overall, the matrix illustrates the intricate relationships between exposure to and perpetration of GBV, relationship norms, sexist attitudes, and various forms of psychological distress, underscoring the interrelatedness of these traits.

5.3.2 Interview Insights

In the YWA interviews, young women noted four thematic challenges, with respect to GBV. These themes are organised by summary of main points, representative quotes, words most mentioned, problems most mentioned, and solutions most mentioned.

5.3.2.1 Prevalence of Sexual Assault and/or Violence

One of the significant findings from the interviews was 90% of young women¹³⁹ identifying sexual assault and/or violence as inevitable.

¹³⁹ n = 180/200, nationally representative sample

Specifically, young women were asked: "Which of the following statements best reflects your view on the likelihood of experiencing sexual assault and/or violence during the 18-28 age range?" They were given 6 options:

- a. Sexual assault and/or violence can be largely prevented with appropriate measures and awareness
- b. Sexual assault and/or violence is sometimes unavoidable, but preventive efforts can reduce its frequency
- c. Sexual assault and/or violence is inevitable
- d. Sexual assault and/or violence is unlikely
- e. Sexual assault and/or violence is highly unlikely
- f. I am unsure or have no opinion on this matter

Out of the 6 options, 90% of young women selected c) Sexual assault and/or violence is inevitable.

5.3.2.2 Theme 1: GBV and Harassment

Summary of main points:

1. GBV and harassment affect the majority of young Australian women. Men are the primary perpetrators of violence in both public and private settings, including public spaces (e.g., streets, public transport, nightlife venues), educational institutions, workplaces, and intimate relationships.
2. Sexual violence, domestic abuse, and harassment start as early as primary school. These behaviours are normalised through societal attitudes and inadequate institutional responses, which fail to punish perpetrators.
3. The prevalence of sexual violence is high. When informed that 51% of women born between 1989 and 1995 report experiencing sexual violence in their lifetime, 73% of interview participants expressed this was likely an "underestimate" due to underreporting and that, per their experience, sexual violence is ubiquitous.
4. Pornography and casual sex culture contribute to harmful attitudes towards women and increased sexual violence by normalising aggressive behaviours; they also create expectations of enjoying certain acts or risking being deemed 'vanilla' or boring/ and making and unrealistic expectations about sex and consent.
5. Alcohol, drugs, and intergenerational trauma are associated with higher rates of domestic violence, particularly in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
6. The LGBTQIA+ community also faces high rates of GBV.
7. Cyber harassment and online violence have emerged as significant threats, with women experiencing stalking, threats, and abuse through social media and digital platforms.

Representative quotes:

1. "I think [domestic violence among my Aboriginal community] is really fuelled by trauma, intergenerational trauma, alcohol and drugs. They have a really big, big influence."
2. "I think that women and gender diverse people and the LGBTQ+ community are victims of [male violence]."
3. "I have heard from friends horrific stories about experiencing dangerous things online."

4. “[During nights out] there were a lot of older men trying to get girls in their cars; it was really scary.”
5. “When I decided to speak out about [my experience of sexual violence] I felt shame, like it was my fault he did the things to me and I was responsible.”
6. “I think there is so much violence against women that is normalised.”
7. “Men, in general, feel like they have a right to our bodies.”
8. “Every woman I speak to has a story of a non-consensual act.”
9. “For young women, violence is perceived as an inherent part of life. It’s a very sad state of affairs.”
10. “I was a victim of sexual assault.”
11. “There are men who constantly push and push and push even when you’ve said no or shown you’re not interested and it puts you in a really uncomfortable position.”

Words most mentioned:



Problems most mentioned:

1. High prevalence of sexual violence and harassment against young women, starting from an early age.
2. Normalisation of GBV in society, perpetuated by media, pornography, and casual sex culture.
3. Impact of pornography and casual sex culture on attitudes towards women and understanding of consent
4. Intergenerational trauma in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities causes high rates of substance abuse and poverty, which are risk factors for domestic violence.
5. Inadequate support systems and legal responses for victims of GBV.
6. Underreporting of sexual violence due to shame, societal stigma, and lack of faith in justice systems.

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Implementing comprehensive, age-appropriate and continuous education on consent, respect, and healthy relationships from primary school onwards.
2. Addressing root causes of violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through culturally sensitive programs that tackle intergenerational trauma, substance abuse, and poverty.
3. Developing stricter regulations on pornography accessibility and content, coupled with media and porn literacy education.
4. Enhancing support systems for victims of GBV, including specialised services for LGBTQIA+ individuals and culturally diverse communities.
5. Promoting open discussions and campaigns to dismantle harmful norms, reduce stigma, and encourage reporting; increasing awareness of reporting mechanisms and support services available especially practical information about experience and wait times.
6. Reforming legal systems to better support victims and hold perpetrators accountable, including improved training for law enforcement and judiciary and stricter consequences for GBV, as opposed to lax sentencing laws.

5.3.2.3 Theme 2: Safety Concerns in Public and Educational Spaces**Summary of main points:**

1. Young women experience significant safety concerns in public spaces, including streets, public transport, nightlife venues, and even during daylight hours, leading to constant vigilance and restricted freedom of movement.
2. Educational settings, from primary schools to universities, are unsafe due to inadequate intervention, inconsistent safety protocols, and a culture that minimises or ignores subtle forms of aggression and harassment.
3. Women adopt precautionary behaviours, such as avoiding certain areas, being hyper-vigilant, sharing their location with friends, and modifying their clothing choices, which impact their quality of life.
4. Catcalling and street harassment are common experiences, starting from a young age, contributing to a sense of vulnerability and objectification.
5. Public transport, especially at night, is a source of anxiety and fear for many women, with infrequent services and poorly lit waiting areas exacerbating concerns.
6. The need for safe community spaces and better-lit areas is emphasised to enhance public safety, with calls for women-only spaces and improved urban planning.
7. There's mention that increased independence for women has paradoxically led to increased exposure to dangerous situations. This is because current social attitudes still perpetuate harm against women, despite providing women with equal rights.

Representative quotes:

1. "I always feel uneasy taking the bus late at night, especially when it's not crowded."
2. "Nobody addresses it because, well, nobody's hit each other."
3. "I would say more spaces in the community for young women to come to and feel safe."

4. “I’m trying to think of more specific examples because obviously all the common ones like getting caught, cat called in the street on the way to work.”
5. “Even though, like now that I work with them for longer, I know that there would be no issues with that. It was merely just an act of kindness on their part.”
6. “Men hold an entitlement around your decisions that can cause an adverse emotional response when you don’t fall into what they want. [It’s] terrifying and it’s a fear that [women] all live with.”

Words most mentioned:



Problems most mentioned:

1. Pervasive fear and anxiety in public spaces restrict women's freedom of movement and quality of life.
2. Inadequate safety measures and intervention strategies in educational settings, particularly for subtle forms of aggression.
3. Frequent experiences of catcalling and street harassment contribute to a hostile public environment for women.
4. Safety concerns on public transport, particularly during off-peak hours and at night.
5. Lack of safe, women-only community spaces and poorly lit public areas.

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Creating more women-only safe spaces in communities and public areas.
2. Improving lighting, surveillance, and security measures in public spaces and transport hubs.
3. Enhancing safety protocols and intervention strategies in educational settings, including training for staff to recognise and address subtle forms of aggression, and more stringent procedures for handling poor behaviour.
4. Increasing frequency and security of public transport services, especially at night, and implementing women-only carriages.
5. Developing urban planning strategies that prioritise women's safety and freedom of movement.

6. Implementing bystander intervention training and public awareness campaigns to combat street harassment and create a culture of collective responsibility for public safety.

5.3.2.4 Theme 3: Challenges in Relationships and Dating*

Summary of main points:

1. In romantic relationships, young women struggle with emotional unavailability, abuse, and societal pressures to conform to traditional gender roles.
2. Gender roles persist in relationships, with men struggling with communication and emotional expression, while women are expected to manage the emotional labour of the relationship.
3. Sexual violence within relationships is a significant issue, stemming from entitlement, toxic masculinity, and misconceptions about consent, particularly in the context of long-term relationships.
4. Dating apps have become a common tool for meeting partners but contribute to hookup culture, potential safety risks, and a sense of disposability in relationships.
5. There's a lack of specific, nuanced education on healthy relationship dynamics, emotional intelligence, and handling adult relationships, leaving young people ill-equipped to navigate complex interpersonal situations.
6. Women face pressure to engage in intimate activities early in relationships, conflicting with personal boundaries and contributing to negative sexual experiences.
7. The influence of pornography on relationship expectations and sexual behaviour is significant, leading to unrealistic and potentially harmful ideas about intimacy.

Representative quotes:

1. "There's a lot of issues with young men not knowing how to, or caring about valuing women's pleasure in intimacy in the first place."
2. "Young people are not taught how to handle relationships as adults. We get this basic, superficial info if we do get it at all."
3. "I think a big part of it is a sense of entitlement, which could have come from messages they've received about relationships and about women in their upbringing. Young men in relationships feel entitled to pleasure and power."
4. "With my first boyfriend, there were connotations of very romantic, intimate sexual activities early on. I was not really ready to do anything like that. He would say 'if we aren't going to do anything sexual, then why are you here.'"
5. "Relationships are run by men."
6. "I want to be able to have conversations about sex, pleasure, and relationships, but I don't think a lot of women do because there's still conditioning for women not to."
7. "We can't live in this world where we pretend that young women don't have their unique experiences, and everything is equal for us. It's not, that's not a reality."
8. "Men seem to only value women who serve a purpose for them, women who pick up their laundry, women who do this or that."
9. "Trying to talk about male chauvinism and violence in a relationship makes men immediately jump on the defence."

10. “I didn’t feel like I was prepared for a relationship. And a lot of it came down to not knowing my worth at the time and not having support in navigating situations where there were power imbalances.”

Words most mentioned:



Problems most mentioned:

1. Persistence of gender roles and expectations in relationships limits equality and privileges men’s desires and fulfilment.
2. Prevalence of sexual violence and coercion within intimate relationships.
3. Lack of specific education on healthy relationship dynamics, consent, and emotional intelligence.
4. Pressure to engage in intimate activities early in relationships, conflicting with personal boundaries.
5. Impact of hookup culture and dating apps on relationship expectations and emotional well-being.
6. Influence of pornography on sexual expectations and behaviours in casual sex and relationships.

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Implementing comprehensive relationship education in schools, covering topics like emotional intelligence, communication, and conflict resolution.
2. Promoting open discussions about healthy relationship dynamics, consent, and pleasure in both educational and social settings.
3. Developing programs to address toxic masculinity and entitlement in relationship contexts, focusing on respect and equality.

4. Creating awareness campaigns about consent and boundaries in intimate relationships, emphasising ongoing consent in long-term partnerships.
5. Providing resources and education for safe and respectful online dating practices.
6. Incorporating media literacy education to critically analyse portrayals of relationships and sex in pornography and mainstream media.

5.3.2.5 Theme 4: Consent Education and Cultural Change

Summary of main points:

1. There is a critical need for consent education starting from a young age, extending beyond sexual contexts to everyday interactions.
2. Current consent education is inadequate. It fails to address power dynamics and real-life scenarios where situations are blurry and fails to highlight the importance of ongoing consent.
3. Consent education should be continuous, extending throughout one's life and across various contexts, including professional environments and social settings.
4. Cultural change is necessary to address the root causes of GBV, including challenging rigid gender norms and promoting equality.
5. The influence of media, particularly pornography, on young people's perceptions of consent is a significant concern, necessitating improved media literacy education.
6. Despite some progress in attitudes towards consent, there's still a long way to go in terms of respect and practical implementation, particularly in perceiving non-verbal cues and power imbalances.
7. Intersectionality in consent education is crucial, considering how different cultural, religious, and social backgrounds may influence the understanding of consent and relationships.

Representative quotes:

1. "I do think that YACVIC's [Youth Affairs Council Victoria] Affirmative Consent Workshops seems like a really good program, because they are co-designed by young people first of all."
2. "Young people's ideas about consent and GBV are more progressive than they were a decade or two ago. But there's still a lot to do."
3. "It's very hard managing that and being able to talk to a white Australian woman who might be secular would be, it would be a very difficult conversation to have because I wouldn't know."
4. "We still have nasty people working in child protection and they really should not be."
5. "In health and physical education, we should learn about how to report sexual violence."
6. "I feel like consent education programs should be starting at a way younger age, so it's instilled in children early."
7. "It's crucial to teach us what our rights are, like, what our basic human rights are and what sexual assault is."
8. "Consent modules at university are terrible."
9. "When we are starting as students, we need to do a module on our student learning website called WADL. It just requires us to click through. No engagement, no knowledge, no understanding."

Words most mentioned:



Problems most mentioned:

1. Inadequate and inconsistent consent education in schools, failing to address real-world scenarios.
2. Influence of pornography and media on young people's understanding of consent and healthy relationships.
3. Societal conditioning that discourages women from having open conversations about sex, pleasure, and boundaries.
4. Lack of inclusive consent education that addresses diverse cultural, religious, and social experiences.
5. Persistence of harmful attitudes and behaviours, especially more covert manipulation, despite some progress in understanding consent.
6. Insufficient attention to power dynamics, ambiguous situations, non-verbal communication, and ongoing consent in educational programs.

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Implementing comprehensive, age-appropriate consent education from primary school onwards, covering both sexual and non-sexual contexts.
2. Developing consent education programs co-designed by young people to ensure relevance and effectiveness.
3. Addressing the influence of pornography and media in consent education through improved media literacy programs.
4. Promoting open conversations about sex, pleasure, relationships, and boundaries in educational and social settings.

5. Creating inclusive consent education considering diverse cultural, religious, and social backgrounds.
6. Focusing on cultural change alongside education, challenging rigid gender norms and promoting broader societal equality.

5.4 Policy Recommendations

Based on these learnings from primary research, YWA recommends the following **targeted policy recommendations** to address the identified issues.

5.4.1 Specific inclusions in Consent and Respectful Relationships Education (CRRE)

Recommendation:	Specific inclusions in CRRE
Objective(s):	Empower schools to deliver comprehensive, evidence-based Consent and Respectful Relationships Education (CRRE) aimed at preventing gender-based violence (GBV) and fostering safe, respectful relationships among students.
Target Area:	Implementation of CRRE across government and non-government primary and secondary schools in Australia from 2024-2028.
Rationale:	By investing in expert-developed CRRE, the policy aims to prevent the onset of intimate partner violence (IPV) and other forms of GBV, thereby ensuring the safety and well-being of children and young people while promoting gender equality.
Timeline for Implementation:	48 months

Recommendation Details:

Reflecting the government’s commitment to eliminating GBV, “All state and territory Education Ministers have signed a \$77.6 million Federation Funding Agreement Schedule with the Australian Government to support the delivery of Consent and Respectful Relationships Education (CRRE) in schools.

Through this agreement, the Australian Government will provide funding to states, territories and the non-government school sector to support their delivery of CRRE across government and non-government primary and secondary schools in school years 2024-2028.

This recognises the important role CRRE plays in preventing GBV and keeping children and young people safe.

Through this funding, states, territories, and the non-government school sector, will support schools to invest in expert-developed, evidence-based and age-appropriate CRRE.

This includes through:

- providing evidence-based professional learning for staff
- rolling out whole-school approaches to preventing GBV
- partnering with high-quality external providers to support delivery of CRRE
- delivering targeted support for vulnerable and marginalised groups, and
- building on the national RRE evidence-base.”¹⁴⁰

To ensure maximal efficacy, per YWA’s analysis of the evidence base, CRRE should consist of the following:

Intervention Point 1: Preventing IPV Onset

This CRRE component aims to prevent the onset and continuation of IPV tendencies, which can begin as early as age 12. Introducing targeted interventions at the beginning of high school can preempt the onset of harmful behaviours. Research has shown that once IPV tendencies start, they continue with ongoing incidents in current and future relationships.¹⁴¹ Thus, primary prevention is crucial.

Promoting core psychological values—wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence—among young people is also essential. These values are inversely related to sexist behaviour and the acceptance of IPV,¹⁴² protecting young people from both perpetration and victimisation.

Per these age-based developmental risks, specific CRRE content is recommended for early and late high school.

Early High School (Years 7-10)

- Developmental Risks:
 - IPV tendencies begin as early as age 12.
 - Students are exposed to media and peers that may propagate sexist behaviours, potentially normalising IPV.
- Targeted Interventions:
 - Start early education on IPV, discussing its signs and consequences, and integrating teachings on consent and respect to prevent the onset of IPV behaviours.

¹⁴⁰ Australian Government Department of Education (2024). Funding for consent and respectful relationships education in Australian schools. <https://www.education.gov.au/newsroom/articles/funding-consent-and-respectful-relationships-education-australian-schools>

¹⁴¹ Ueno, K., & Fincham, F. D. (2013). The continuation of intimate partner violence from adolescence to young adulthood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 75(2), 456-468. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12016>

¹⁴² Rodríguez-Castro, M. J., Lameiras-Fernández, M., Carrera-Fernández, E., & Vallejo-Medina, A. (2013). Psychological values as protective factors against sexist attitudes in preadolescents. *Psicothema*, 25(1), 31-37. <https://doi.org/10.7334/psicothema2012.253>

- Implement a short media literacy program to help students analyse and critique gender portrayals in the media and understand their impact on societal expectations and personal behaviour.
- Start introducing psychological values—wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence—particularly their definitions, manifestations in role models, and how to cultivate them through small, everyday actions.

Late High School (Years 11-12):

- **Men-Specific Developmental Risks:**
 - Students' gender identities and attitudes toward gender roles become more pronounced, which may reinforce norms that lead to IPV.
 - Students often enter more serious relationships, which include challenges such as negotiating boundaries and managing emotional intensity.
- **Men-Specific Targeted Interventions:**
 - Integrate workshops focused on consent, communication, and the dynamics of healthy versus unhealthy relationships, incorporating real-life scenarios.
 - Address IPV scenarios through role-playing, teaching students how to handle potential violence and aggression, with an emphasis on psychological strengths such as justice, humanity, and transcendence.
- **Women-Specific Developmental Risks*:**
 - Increased risk of experiencing serious relationship issues, including sexual assault and violence.
 - Challenges such as coercive control, manipulative behaviours, and navigating consent within relationships.
- **Women-Specific Targeted Interventions:**
 - Integrate workshops that give insight on identifying and establishing healthy relationship boundaries, and recognising signs of unhealthy or abusive relationships.
 - Provide information on resources for navigating sexual assault, including counselling, legal advice, and support groups.
 - Give advice on aiding peers in IPV situations.
 - Incorporate a topic that addresses how acceptance of abuse (emotional, physical, and gender violence) is a predictor of further victimisation. Particularly, help adolescents understand and dismantle the justifications that make abuse seem acceptable or less severe.

*YWA's research analysis shows that the acceptance of abuse and benevolent sexist attitudes can lead to greater victimisation in women in abusive or potentially abusive situations. Therefore, programs should focus on reducing the acceptance of abuse and challenging benevolent sexism, which often masks the severity of the abuse and contributes to its normalisation.

Intervention Point 2: Cognitive Dissonance and Value Reassessment Workshops

This CRRE inclusion aims to diminish sexist behaviour by inducing cognitive dissonance. Upon realising the dissonance in and between their beliefs and behaviours, individuals should realign their attitudes and

actions to be more consistent with egalitarian principles. Inspired by Milton Rokeach's research on long-term modification of values and behaviour, this inclusion will induce self-dissatisfaction to encourage actions towards gender equality. In one of Rokeach's key experiments at Michigan State University, participants ranked a set of values and expressed their attitudes towards civil rights demonstrations. They were then presented with contrasting societal norms, which created a state of self-dissatisfaction when they recognised the discrepancies between their own rankings and broader societal values, particularly equality. This induced dissonance led to significant long-term changes in their values and attitudes (up to 21 months; almost 2 years). Rokeach's findings suggest that carefully structured interventions can alter deeply held values and attitudes, influencing social behaviours over extended periods.

Value Reassessment Workshop:

- Start with a facilitator-led session providing data on societal norms versus personal beliefs, using anonymised aggregate data on values such as freedom and equality. Participants anonymously rank their own values in a confidential survey, which will then be compared to the group average during the workshop.
- Facilitators highlight discrepancies between individual and group rankings, mainly focusing on values where societal expectations (e.g., equality) are ranked lower by individuals. This discrepancy is framed as a challenge to personal integrity, morality, and societal responsibilities, aiming to induce feelings of self-dissatisfaction.
- Role-playing scenarios reflecting common sexist situations are employed to make the dissonance more tangible. Participants discuss how these situations align with the dissonance highlighted earlier and explore their feelings and reactions.

Personal and Group Reflection Sessions:

- Participants keep journals to document weekly instances where their actions or observed behaviours of others conflict with their earlier professed values. This is designed to continuously invoke cognitive dissonance and introspection.
- Monthly group sessions allow participants to share experiences from their journals. These meetings serve as a support group where individuals can discuss challenges and progress in aligning their behaviours with their values, framing this as a difficult but worthwhile endeavour.

Public Commitment to Change:

- At the end of the initial workshop series, participants share their personal values and commitments, as well as how they practise these, in a personal essay-style event. The mutual sharing strengthens the commitment to change by leveraging peer support and accountability.

Longitudinal Evaluation and Reinforcement:

- A longitudinal study is conducted using anonymous surveys at 3, 12, 24, and 36 months post-intervention to measure changes in attitudes and behaviours. This data is added to the Standardised Monitoring and Evaluation Platform (Policy Recommendation #5.4.3.4).

Intervention Point 3: Teaching Emotional Regulation to Young Men to Prevent IPV

Difficulties in emotion regulation are a significant predictor of IPV perpetration. Young men who struggle with identifying, understanding, and managing their emotions are more likely to engage in aggressive behaviours. Effective emotional regulation education can mitigate IPV perpetration risks by equipping young men with skills to manage their emotions constructively, instead of lashing out towards their partners.

Key Components:

Emotional Awareness and Identification:

- Objective: Help young men recognise and accurately label their emotions.
- Methods: Psychoeducation, mind mapping, and reflective practices.

Cognitive Reappraisal:

- Objective: Teach young men to reinterpret negative situations in a more positive or neutral light.
- Methods: Scenario-based training and construal.

Impulse Control and Distress Tolerance:

- Objective: Improve the ability to control impulsive reactions and tolerate emotional distress without resorting to aggression.
- Methods: Mindfulness training, distress tolerance skills, and problem-solving skills.

Goal-Directed Behaviour:

- Objective: Foster the ability to maintain goal-directed behaviour even when experiencing negative emotions.
- Methods: Goal-setting workshops, behavioural activation, and accountability groups.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL):

- Objective: Integrate SEL principles to promote empathy, respect, and healthy relationship skills.
- Methods: Empathy training, communication skills, and conflict resolution strategies.

Intervention Point 4: Providing a Model of Masculinity

Heroic masculinity is a form of masculine identity and behaviour that stands in contrast to toxic masculinity. While toxic masculinity is characterised by aggression, dominance, and a lack of empathy, heroic masculinity involves using traditionally masculine strengths - such as courage, leadership, and protective instincts - to serve and benefit others. Key aspects include using power to protect rather than

dominate vulnerable people, showing courage in the face of adversity, embracing emotional strength and vulnerability, and demonstrating a commitment to justice and equality.

Incorporating heroic masculinity into CRRE could provide boys with a positive framework for navigating intimate relationships. By highlighting examples of men who embody heroic masculine qualities in their relationships, CRRE can encourage boys to channel their own masculine energies into being supportive and empowering partners.

Heroic masculinity can be integrated into CRRE through:

1. Sharing real-life stories of men who have demonstrated courage and leadership in supporting survivors of sexual violence, challenging toxic masculine norms, and advocating for gender equality in their communities.
2. Analysing media representations of masculine behaviour in relationships, and discussing how portrayals of heroic masculinity (e.g., men who prioritise consent, respect boundaries, and stand up against abuse) can provide positive alternatives to toxic masculine scripts.
3. Practising skills for enacting heroic masculinity in everyday relationship moments, such as asking for consent, intervening when a partner is being disrespected, and being vulnerable about one's own emotions and needs.
4. Encouraging boys to reflect on the positive masculine role models in their lives who have modelled healthy, equitable ways of being in relationships, and exploring what qualities and actions make these men heroic.
5. Engaging boys in redefining masculine strength in the context of relationships, shifting away from notions of dominance and control and toward ideas of courage, empathy, responsibility, and partnership.

This positive archetype of the everyday masculine hero - one who stands up for what is right, protects the vulnerable, and is not afraid to show emotional depth - can be an inspiration for boys.

Intervention Point 5: Incorporating Grey Zones in GBV into CRRE

Grey zones¹⁴³ are responsible for the sometimes ambiguous nature of GBV among young adults. Grey zones in IPV refer to ambiguous situations or behaviours that blur the lines between abuse and non-abuse, complicating the identification and understanding of IPV. These include reactive abuse, where a victim's defensive aggression is manipulated to portray them as the abuser; ambiguous consent and sexual coercion, where relational pressures make consensual and non-consensual sex indistinguishable; subtle verbal and emotional abuse, such as gaslighting, that erodes a victim's reality and self-worth; and cultural and social norms that normalise control or coercion, obscuring the recognition of abusive behaviour.

Incorporating real-life, practicable, and confusing scenarios into CRRE is integral for helping young people navigate these grey zones. For example, discussing vignettes of everyday GBV situations can make these grey zones visible and promote critical reflection. These scenarios could include:

¹⁴³ Cerdán-Torregrosa, A., Nardini, K., & Vives-Cases, C. (2023). "I Reject it, But That's What Normally Happens": Grey Zones of Gender-Based Violence and Gender Roles in Young People. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 38(11-12). <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605221147070>

- Subtle Forms of GBV: Examples include controlling behaviours disguised as concern, unsolicited digital communication, and coercive tactics in relationships.
- Victim-Blaming: Scenarios where victims are held responsible for the violence they experience, highlighting the need to challenge these harmful narratives.
- Digital GBV: Instances of online harassment, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, and cyberstalking.
- Verbal and non-verbal communication: Hesitancy in expressing one's boundaries and how to use non-verbal cues when struggling with verbal communication.
- Bystander Intervention: Situations where bystanders witness GBV but are unsure how to intervene effectively.

CRRE should also examine how gender roles and stereotypes normalise and justify violence. For example, the discourse of “men as authors of GBV” versus “GBV as an individual genderless issue” reflects the tension between recognising the gendered nature of violence and the tendency to depersonalise it.

Intervention Point 6: Sexual Assertiveness Training in CRRE

Research shows that IPV and DFSV victimisation rates are negatively correlated with sexual assertiveness.^{144 145 146} Low sexual assertiveness can contribute to sexual re-victimisation, as women who are less assertive may struggle to communicate their unwillingness to engage in sexual activities, leading to misunderstandings or exploitation by perpetrators.

Sexual assertiveness training is positively correlated with women's ability to refuse unwanted sexual advances, feel comfortable in expressing consent in a nuanced fashion to permissible and non-permissible sexual activities, enhance their sexual health, and increase their self-esteem and satisfaction in interpersonal relationships.^{147 148} This approach not only empowers young women but also contributes to the broader goal of preventing sexual violence and fostering a culture of consent and respect. Alongside this, it is important to challenge the association of attraction with aggression; young women who find aggression attractive are significantly more likely to be made victims of sexual violence.¹⁴⁹

Collective Rationale

Collectively, these CRRE inclusions offer a robust strategy to combat GBV. Key components include specialised interventions for at-risk youth, cognitive dissonance workshops to reshape values, emotional

¹⁴⁴ Livingston, J. A., Testa, M., & VanZile-Tamsen, C. (2007). The reciprocal relationship between sexual victimization and sexual assertiveness. *Violence Against Women, 13*(3), 298-313. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801206297339>

¹⁴⁵ Krahe, B., & Berger, A. (2013). Gendered pathways from alcohol use to sexual aggression in a cross-cultural perspective. *Aggressive behavior, 39*(4), 293-304. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.21482>

¹⁴⁶ Livingston, J. A., Testa, M., & VanZile-Tamsen, C. (2007). The reciprocal relationship between sexual victimization and sexual assertiveness. *Violence Against Women, 13*(3), 298-313. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801206297339>

¹⁴⁷ López-Barranco, P. J., Jiménez-Ruiz, I., Leal-Costa, C., & Jiménez-Barbero, J. A. (2023). Analysis of the relationship between sexual violence and assertive behavior in young Spanish adults. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-023-00928-7>

¹⁴⁸ Rusinko, Holly Michelle. “The efficacy of verbal assertiveness training on reducing risk of sexual assault.” PhD diss., University of North Dakota, 2011.

¹⁴⁹ Puigvert, L., Gelsthorpe, L., Soler-Gallart, M., & Flecha, R. (2019). Girls' perceptions of boys with violent attitudes and behaviours, and their risk of suffering gender violence. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, 6*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-019-0262-5>

regulation training for young men, addressing grey zones in GBV, and sexual assertiveness training for young women. Evidence indicates that including these initiatives within CRRE can significantly reduce GBV, cultivate healthier, more respectful relationships among young Australians, and promote gender justice. Additionally, research suggests that romantic love is pivotal in driving gender-equality.¹⁵⁰

5.4.2 Targeted Social Media Campaign to Challenge Gender Equality Misconceptions Among At-Risk Young Men

Recommendation:	Targeted Social Media Campaign to Challenge Gender Equality Misconceptions Among At-Risk Young Men
Objective(s):	To strategically address and mitigate misconceptions about gender equality among at-risk young men through a targeted social media campaign, thereby reducing potential backlash against feminist activism and promoting informed perspectives on gender issues.
Target Area:	High-risk young men engaged with online content that reinforces misogynistic views, primarily through social media platforms.
Rationale:	Recognising that confrontational feminist activism can sometimes trigger reactance and reinforce harmful beliefs, this campaign aims to provide historically informed, non-confrontational education on gender equality, leveraging influential male voices to broaden the message’s appeal and ultimately foster a more equitable understanding of gender dynamics among young men.
Timeline for Implementation:	4 months

Recommendation Details:

CRRE should be complemented by a strategic informational social media campaign addressing misconceptions about gender equality among at-risk young men. This recommendation is to mitigate any unintended consequences of feminist activism. While the goal of feminist activism is to challenge rape myths and raise awareness of sexual violence, studies have shown that confrontational approaches can sometimes backfire, particularly among young men. Exposure to feminist activism directly challenging rape myths has been associated with greater reactance in some young men, reinforcing the very beliefs it aims to challenge.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ The Great Gender Divergence. (2024). Romantic love is an under-rated driver of gender equality. <https://www.ggd.world/p/romantic-love-is-an-under-rated-driver>

¹⁵¹ Rogers, M. A., & Kincaid, D. L. (2023). Social media communication about sexual violence may backfire: An experiment examining the impact of digital feminist activism on college-aged men. *Journal of Health Communication*, 28(3), 217-231. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.2023.2174214>

Accordingly, a carefully crafted social media campaign is proposed. This campaign would disseminate a series of infographics articulating the historical and systemic factors creating gender disparities. It would include women’s relatively recent acquisition of rights, statistical evidence of ongoing inequalities, and how ‘two lines begun parallel and left untouched can never meet.’¹⁵²

Advertising would be targeted toward users who are classified in the high-risk category based on their online behaviours, for example due to their engagement in specific content types, including following influencers and/or accounts known to share misogynistic views. Collaborations with male influencers not traditionally associated with feminist movements but respected in other domains (e.g., entertainment, sport) could broaden the message's appeal. Success would be measured through performance and engagement metrics (e.g., likes, shares, sentiment in comments), with the ultimate goal being steadily challenging misconceptions and promoting a more historically-informed understanding of gender equality among young men.

5.4.3 Develop a National Agenda for Research and Action → Establish a Central Funding Register → Engage Philanthropic Organisations → Standardised Monitoring and Evaluation

Recommendation:	Develop a National Agenda for Research and Action → Establish a Central Funding Register → Engage Philanthropic Organisations → Standardised Monitoring and Evaluation
Objective(s):	To develop and implement a comprehensive, community-driven strategy for primary prevention and early intervention of gender-based violence (GBV) across Australia, ensuring culturally appropriate, contextually relevant, and evidence-based approaches that address the unique needs of diverse demographic groups.
Target Area:	Nationwide implementation, with a focus on Indigenous communities, rural populations, urban youth, and other at-risk groups across Australia.
Rationale:	This policy aims to build a robust framework for preventing and intervening early in GBV by addressing critical issues identified through collaborative research and community engagement. By establishing a central funding register, engaging philanthropic organisations, and standardising monitoring and

¹⁵² Randall Robinson, an American lawyer, author and activist, wrote in his book, ‘The Debt: What America Owes To Blacks,’ “No nation can enslave a race of people for hundreds of years, set them free bedraggled and penniless, pit them, without assistance in a hostile environment, against privileged victimisers, and then reasonably expect the gap between the heirs of the two groups to narrow. Lines, begun parallel and left alone, can never touch.” Robinson's concept applies powerfully to gender justice, revealing the systemic and enduring nature of gender inequalities. Like racial inequality, gender inequality has deep historical roots. Women have been denied basic rights—voting, education, employment—and systematically excluded from public life, leading to entrenched disparities in wealth, power, and opportunity. This exclusion mirrors Robinson's metaphor of parallel lines that never meet, as societal norms and institutional barriers have set women and men on divergent paths. Today, women still face significant challenges: wage gaps, underrepresentation in leadership, workplace discrimination, and compounded issues like gender-based violence and legal obstacles. Addressing these persistent inequalities requires systemic change—policy reforms, advocacy for women's rights, and dismantling patriarchal structures. Without intentional intervention, the gap between men and women, like parallel lines, will persist.

	evaluation processes, the policy ensures that resources are effectively allocated, initiatives are grounded in community needs, and evidence-based practices are scaled and sustained over time, contributing to a safer and more equitable society.
Timeline for Implementation:	18 months

Recommendation Details:

1. Develop a National Agenda for Research and Action

Create a plan focused on primary prevention and early intervention, inspired by the ANROWS Australia's National Research Agenda (ANRA) model. Identify critical issues affecting various groups across Australia, including Indigenous communities, rural populations, and urban youth. Consult with local organisations, community leaders, and subject matter experts to design research projects and pilot programs that address these issues. This collaborative approach ensures initiatives are culturally appropriate and contextually relevant..

2. Establish a Central Funding Register

Create a user-friendly online platform that acts as a central register for available funding. List all funds earmarked for research and pilot programs related to primary prevention and early intervention. Include clear, transparent criteria for funding allocation, based on factors such as potential impact, innovation, and alignment with prevention goals. Design the platform for ease of use, allowing researchers and organisations to search for relevant funding opportunities and apply efficiently. This centralised approach helps ensure effective resource distribution and support for promising initiatives.

3. Engage Philanthropic Organisations

Invite philanthropic organisations to contribute to the funding pool. This will expand available resources for prevention and intervention work beyond government while still ensuring efforts are grounded in community needs.

4. Standardised Monitoring and Evaluation

Support standardisation of monitoring and evaluation through clear guidelines for measurement of initiatives and processes for integration of feedback to improve approaches. This includes conducting longitudinal studies to track outcomes over extended periods, providing insights into the long-term impacts of various interventions, and development of an online platform where all projects can report their findings using consistent metrics. This platform will facilitate uniform data collection and analysis across different initiatives and regions. It will also serve as a repository of effective practices, documenting what works, at what life stage, and for which demographic groups in primary prevention and early intervention. This growing body of evidence will inform future initiatives and contribute to the national evidence base.

5.4.4 Modern Relationships Essay Series: Curriculum Integration

Recommendation:	Modern Relationships Essay Series: Curriculum Integration
Objective(s):	To enrich relationship education for young people by integrating real-world experiences and critical discussions into the curriculum, fostering a deeper understanding of healthy relationship dynamics, consent, communication, and emotional intelligence.
Target Area:	Nationwide implementation in secondary school English curricula, with a focus on students in years 9-12.
Rationale:	Current relationship education fails to adequately prepare young people for the complexities of modern relationships. By adapting the storytelling approach of the popular 'Modern Love' series, this policy aims to bridge the gap between theoretical concepts and real-life challenges. It addresses issues such as changing gender roles, digital abuse, and emotional vulnerability, equipping students with the tools to navigate relationships thoughtfully and safely in an evolving social landscape.
Timeline for Implementation:	9 months

Recommendation Details:

The Modern Relationships Essay Series is proposed to bridge the gap between theoretical relationship education and real-world experiences of young people. The series will adapt the storytelling approach of 'Modern Love,'¹⁵³ a popular New York Times series incorporating a weekly column, book, podcast and television show. These stories will be starting points for discussions about consent, communication, and emotional intelligence.

Current relationship education presents idealised scenarios that fail to prepare young people for the complexities they encounter. YWA interviews have revealed a concerning pattern: some young men, when faced with emotionally charged or unfamiliar situations, resort to aggressive behaviour rather than expressing vulnerability. The essay series will address this by providing detailed, relatable examples of challenging situations and offering constructive ways to navigate them.

Changing gender roles and their impact on relationship dynamics will be a key component of the series. The essays will examine traditional expectations, emerging norms, and how these affect power balances within relationships. They will present diverse perspectives on gender roles, prompting students to think critically about societal expectations and personal values.

¹⁵³ <https://www.nytimes.com/column/modern-love>

The series will address digital abuse through personal, anonymised narratives of cyberstalking, revenge porn, and online harassment. These accounts will show how digital abuse often develops gradually and provide readers with ways to recognise, prevent, and respond to such situations.

Students will learn about philosophical models of love, from classical to modern. The curriculum will compare these models with media portrayals of relationships, helping students develop a deeper understanding of healthy partnerships. Guided exercises will encourage students to consider their own relationship goals and standards for themselves and potential partners.

Implementing the series will involve working with educational authorities to incorporate the content into existing curricula, likely within English classes.

5.4.5 NSW MBCP Funding & Trial Program

Recommendation:	Modern Relationships Essay Series: Curriculum Integration
Objective(s):	To enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of Men’s Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs) in New South Wales by increasing funding, improving service coordination, and strengthening the MBCP workforce to better address domestic and family violence.
Target Area:	Men’s Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs) across New South Wales, with a particular focus on expanding services, including support for Aboriginal-controlled community organisations.
Rationale:	Despite the recent increase in funding, the demand for MBCPs far exceeds current capacity, with nearly 500 men on waiting lists. This policy aims to close the gap by ensuring that more men can access timely and effective interventions to address their violent behaviours. By funding the integration of standardised Client Record Management (CRM) systems and extending contract terms for service providers, the policy seeks to improve coordination, data tracking, and workforce stability, ultimately leading to more consistent and impactful outcomes in the fight against domestic and family violence.
Timeline for Implementation:	9 months

Status Quo:

Despite recognition that Men’s Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs) “these programs play an integral role in ending domestic and family violence,”¹⁵⁴ there are currently almost 500 men waiting to access them. The main program led by Relationships Australia NSW involves group therapy and tailored support lasting 18 weeks. In the June 2024 budget, an additional \$10 million in funding over the next four years

¹⁵⁴ NTV. (2024) NSW Budget funding boost to stop men using family violence vital for victim-survivor safety. <https://ntv.org.au/nsw-budget-funding-boost-to-stop-men-using-family-violence-vital-for-victim-survivor-safety/#:~:text=Frontline%20services%20working%20with%20men,30%25%20increase%20to%20existing%20funding.>

(\$2.5 million/year) was allocated to these programs.¹⁵⁵ This increase in funding is “an important step towards ensuring there are accessible interventions to help end men’s use of domestic and family violence in NSW.”¹⁵⁶ Despite this 30% increase in existing funding, YWA’s research indicates that more funding is necessary for key improvements, as illustrated in the table below.

Current concerns include that only 16 service providers are funded to deliver MBCPs, with only one being an Aboriginal-controlled community organisation. While MBCPs have demonstrated potential for coordinated community response through engaging with perpetrators, victim-survivors, police, and the justice system, limited resources make coordination difficult.

Table 11 shows 2022-2024 MBCP contracts with the NSW Government. In summary, between 2022-2024, in NSW:

1. Total funding for MBCPs: \$17,115,944.66 (including GST)
2. Funding period: July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2024 (2 years)
3. Annual funding cost: \$8,557,972.33
4. Number of organisations: 16
5. Average annual funding per organisation: \$534,872.02

Table 11: 2022-2024 MBCP contracts with the NSW Government

Organisation	MBCP contract cost (including GST)	MBCP contract cost (excluding GST)	Funding cost per year
Men & Family Centre	\$1,326,584.60	\$1,205,986.00	\$602,993.00
Manning Support Services	\$484,688.60	\$440,626.00	\$220,313.00
North East MBC	\$373,428.00	\$339,480.00	\$169,740.00
Relationships Australia NSW	\$2,517,900.00	\$2,289,000.00	\$1,144,500.00
Housing Plus	\$782,553.20	\$711,412.00	\$355,706.00
Warrina DFV Specialist Services	\$968,000.00	\$880,000.00	\$440,000.00
Gawura Aboriginal Corporation	\$839,931.40	\$763,574.00	\$381,787.00
EveryMan Australia	\$297,440.00	\$270,400.00	\$135,200.00
CentaCare NENW	\$592,204.82	\$538,368.02	\$269,184.01

¹⁵⁵ NSW Government. (2024). Treasurer’s Speech: 2024-25 Budget. https://www.budget.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-06/20240618-2024-25_Budget-Treasurers-Speech.pdf

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

CatholicCare Wilcannia-Forbes	\$2,109,360.00	\$1,917,600.00	\$958,800.00
CatholicCare Sydney Fairfield	\$2,153,217.00	\$1,957,470.00	\$978,735.00
CatholicCare Broken Bay	\$1,430,829.00	\$1,300,753.64	\$650,376.82
Mission Australia Central & Far West	\$1,539,254.20	\$1,399,322.00	\$699,661.00
Kempsey	\$759,000.00	\$690,000.00	\$345,000.00
BaptistCare NSW and ACT MBCP	\$1,764,348.30	\$1,603,953.00	\$801,976.50
Anglicare Sydney MBCP	\$888,800.00	\$808,000.00	\$404,000.00
Total		\$17,115,944.66	\$8,557,972.33

Recommendation Details:

Immediate, 'quick wins' involve funding and setting up annual access to standardised Client Record Management (CRM) systems for MBCPs throughout New South Wales at a cost of approximately \$300,000, and extending contract terms from 2 years to 5 years to better develop and retain the MBCP workforce. The integrated CRM will ensure streamlined communication, efficient case management, and improved data tracking across all MBCPs. Extended contract terms will provide stability and incentivise practitioners to complete the training requirements*, ensuring a skilled and reliable workforce.

Table 12: Proposed approach to scale up MBCP in NSW

Year	Investment	Aim	Outcomes
Annual	\$2.5 million	Build workforce capacity through NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Build MBCP Traineeship system ● Expand delivery of Graduate Certificate in Men's Behaviour Change (MBC) ● Expand DV training across other sectors (Mental health, drug and alcohol, nursing, etc) ● Create a DV training package specifically for first responders

One-off	\$300,000	Build centralised client record management (CRM) system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conduct review of current minimum data set and reporting requirements ● Reduce administrative burden and increase frontline service delivery ● Provide better data sets for research and evaluation ● Better implementation of Risk and Safety Support Framework
Annual	\$50 million	Expand the role of MBC as part of a Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implement best practices (as per 'No To Violence' budget submission) ● Implement MBC Screening (with associated specialised risk assessment) as mandatory for all Domestic Abuse bail conditions ● Expand access to MBCPs for more NSW residents ● Fund annual access to standardised CRM ● MBCPs become champions of coordinated community response ● Offer primary prevention information sessions in community
One-off	\$2.5 million	Implement a two-year trial program to address MBC , alcohol and other drugs (AOD), and mental health issues through a structured residential program. This trial aims to reduce family violence by providing a dedicated space where men can work on their behaviour while receiving support for AOD and mental health issues, inspired by the successful Communicare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Allow men to be bailed to a program residence, preventing the need for partners and children to relocate ● Offer a residential program that includes educational group work, informal counselling, individual case management, and advocacy, requiring participants to engage in all aspects of the program, abstain from substance use, and contribute to their lodging costs ● Ensure the safety of women and children by promoting accountability among participants and providing alternative coping strategies to violence and abuse ● Integrate a Women's Advocate within the program to support

		Breathing Space program** in Western Australia.	partners and families affected by participants' behaviours <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop a practice guide and program materials, and establish a framework that could be expanded nationally if successful ● Contribute to the broader goals of reducing family violence, as seen in national efforts like the Supporting Recovery Program, which focuses on long-term mental health support for victim-survivors
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*At least one facilitator present in group delivery must have a Graduate Certificate in MBC and/or 200 hours of MBC service delivery. They must have completed the Education Centre Against Violence (ECAV) DV foundational skills training, such as ECAV’s DV-601 ‘Practical Skills in Responding to People who Experience Domestic and Family Violence.’ Additionally, the facilitator should have at least 2 years of work experience in providing counselling or support services to people who experience domestic violence and must have completed the ECAV MB702 Essential Skills in MBCP training. Ideally, they will have also completed ECAV’s MB712 Essential Skills (Level 2) in MBC.

Any other staff member facilitating the group must meet the following criteria: they must have completed, at a minimum, the Education Centre Against Violence (ECAV) DV foundational skills training, such as ECAV’s DV-601 ‘Practical Skills in Responding to People who Experience Domestic and Family Violence,’ and/or have at least 2 years of work experience in providing counselling or support services to people who experience domestic violence. They must also have completed the ECAV MB702 Essential Skills in MBCP training. Ideally, they will have also completed ECAV’s MB712 Essential Skills (Level 2) in MBC.

**The Communicare Breathing Space program in Western Australia has demonstrated effectiveness in addressing MBC, AOD, and mental health issues through several key elements.

Firstly, the program's residential setting provides a structured environment where men can focus on behaviour change without the distractions and triggers of their usual environment. This stability allows for intensive engagement in educational group work, informal counselling, and individual case management. Group activities such as “Men Relating Safely,” “Emotions & Feelings,” and “Parenting & Caring” help participants develop alternative coping strategies and communication styles that do not involve violence.

Secondly, the program emphasises accountability and responsibility. Participants are required to engage fully in all aspects of the program, abstain from substance use, and commit to non-violence. This commitment is crucial for fostering a sense of personal responsibility for their actions and encouraging long-term behavioural change.

The inclusion of a Women's Advocate supports the partners and families of participants by providing advocacy and referral services. This approach not only supports the men in changing their behaviour but also addresses the broader impact of their actions on their families whilst ensuring the safety and well-being of victim-survivors is prioritised.

Additionally, the program offers supported transition accommodation to help participants reintegrate into the community after completing the intensive phase. This transitional support includes assistance with employment, training, and securing future accommodation, which helps maintain the progress made during the program and reduces the risk of reoffending.

Overall, the Communicare Breathing Space program's comprehensive approach, combining residential treatment, accountability measures, advocacy for families, and transitional support, has proven effective in changing attitudes and behaviours related to MBC, AOD, and mental health issues.

5.4.6 Designing Your Life Courses

Recommendation:	Designing Your Life Courses
Objective(s):	To integrate 'Designing Your Life' courses into the high school curriculum as a proactive measure in violence prevention, fostering critical thinking, self-reflection, and strategic life planning to reduce the risk of intimate partner violence (IPV) perpetration and exposure by addressing underlying issues of precarious masculinity and status anxiety.
Target Area:	High schools across Australia, with mandatory implementation in the curriculum for students in years 10-12, focusing on personal development, career planning, and the intersection of gender and societal roles.
Rationale:	<p>The introduction of 'Designing Your Life' courses into educational curricula is a preventative strategy for combating the social and personal dynamics contributing to IPV. Given the destabilisation of traditional roles, especially for young men, there is a critical need for interventions that cultivate a sense of purpose away from strict gender roles. These courses, which utilise design thinking principles to inform life planning and personal growth, offer young men and women the tools to build their identities and statuses in socially constructive ways, rather than through dominance, aggression or disrespect in relationships.</p> <p>Research has shown that "No hope for the future" is the greatest contributor to IPV perpetration among young men.¹⁵⁷ Further research, such as the 'Precarious Manhood'¹⁵⁸ studies, highlights how societal views on masculinity as an</p>

¹⁵⁷ Holliday, C. N., Morse, S. M., Irvin, N. A., Green-Manning, A., Nitsch, L. M., Burke, J. G., Campbell, J. C., & Decker, M. R. (2019). Concept Mapping: Engaging Urban Men to Understand Community Influences on Partner Violence Perpetration. *Journal of urban health : bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, 96(1), 97–111. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-018-0297-8>

¹⁵⁸ Vandello, J. A., Bosson, J. K., Cohen, D., Burnaford, R. M., & Weaver, J. R. (2008). Precarious manhood. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95(6), 1325-1339. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0012453>

	<p>unstable status, which men have to constantly prove, can lead to psychological distress and aggressive behaviours. These pressures are amplified by societal changes that challenge traditional male roles; subsequently, men may resort to domination within the private sphere to assert their authority and purpose, contributing to higher rates of GBV perpetration and exposure (Nordic paradox¹⁵⁹).</p> <p>By employing design thinking methodologies, ‘Designing Your Life’ courses can help individuals create personal and professional lives that are meaningful, fulfilling, and status-proffering, thus undermining the foundations of IPV and GBV.</p>
Timeline for Implementation:	12 months

Status Quo:

The integration of ‘Designing Your Life’ courses into education represents a paradigm shift in violence prevention, targeting the existential void that often precedes intimate partner abuse. By reframing personal development as a design challenge, these courses provide a pragmatic antidote to the precarious masculinity and status anxiety that fuel GBV, potentially disrupting the paradoxical increase in domestic abuse observed in societies with greater gender equality.

Presently, Australian schools do not offer a dedicated ‘Designing Your Life’ course, and students are not explicitly encouraged to think critically about their future goals, personal development, and life planning. The existing curriculum lacks structured opportunities for students to self-reflect and strategically plan their personal and professional lives. Consequently, many students graduate without a clear vision or the necessary skills to navigate their futures effectively. The absence of these skills prevents some men from developing their identities in a socially constructive way; subsequently, they rely on domination in the private sphere to feel purposeful and authoritative, thus contributing to higher rates of GBV perpetration and exposure.

Recommendation Details:

Problem Identification and Reframing

- Teach students to identify core life and career problems as opportunities for growth, as opposed to challenges. This approach breaks down overwhelming challenges into manageable components, reducing negative emotions and reactionary behaviour.

¹⁵⁹ The Nordic paradox refers to how Nordic countries, despite their high levels of gender equality, also have high rates of intimate partner violence against women. This contradiction challenges the belief that greater gender equality naturally reduces gender-based violence. Denmark, Finland, and Sweden have some of the highest rates of IPVAW (intimate partner violence against women) in Europe, with around 30-32% of women reporting having experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a partner. Iceland reports that about 40% of women experience gender-based and sexual violence in their lifetime.

- Encourage students to look beyond societal expectations to focus on their individual strengths and personal and moral interests.

Prototyping Life Paths

- Introduce the concept of life ‘prototyping,’ where students can explore multiple career and life pathways in low-risk environments. This could involve desktop research, internships (in-person and virtual), shadowing opportunities, including those leveraging technology, or simulated experiences.
- Encourage iterative learning where failure is seen as a valuable part of discovering what resonates with a student's passions and skills.
- These internships should become a part of the high school careers curriculum. They are designed to encourage students to try something rapidly and intensely to test if they enjoy it and then continue if so or move on to something else. This allows students to determine their interests quickly, without committing to an extended internship.

Building a Compass

- Facilitate the creation of a personal ‘compass’ that includes articulating one's ‘Workview’ and ‘Lifeview’—defining what work and life mean to the individual and how they can harmonise these to create a coherent and fulfilling life.
- Stress the importance of aligning these views with personal integrity and societal contributions.

Implementation

- Embed ‘Designing Your Life’ courses into the high school curriculum as mandatory.
- Include specific sessions that address the intersection of gender, society, and personal development.
- Develop support groups within the course structure where students can share ideas, challenges, and successes. Peer-to-peer mentoring can be particularly impactful in reinforcing course teachings, encouraging personal growth, and creating accountability especially during a developmental period where peer validation is highly sought after.
- Integrate the efficacy of ‘Designing Your Life’ courses into the Standardised Monitoring and Evaluation Platform (Policy Recommendation #5.4.3.4) and track students’ longitudinal outcomes both in the context of life fulfilment and IPV perpetration.

5.4.7 Life Transition Support for Young Women

Recommendation:	Life Transition Support for Young Women
Objective(s):	To establish and fund the Young Women’s Alliance (YWA) as a dedicated life transition support organisation, providing comprehensive resources, referrals, and support to young women aged 18-28, with the goal of mitigating gender disadvantage and promoting personal, educational, and professional development during this critical period.

Target Area:	High schools across Australia, with mandatory implementation in the curriculum for students in years 10-12, focusing on personal development, career planning, and the intersection of gender and societal roles.
Rationale:	Nationwide implementation, focusing on young women transitioning from high school to their twenties, with particular emphasis on those in rural and regional communities across Australia.
Timeline for Implementation:	12 months

Status Quo:

There are no dedicated life transition support organisations for young women in Australia. Young women transitioning from high school to university and into their twenties face a precarious period marked by heightened risks of sexual assault, gender discrimination, life-threatening violence, and political marginalisation. Despite clear evidence of these vulnerabilities and the effectiveness of interventions during this period, young women are scarcely mentioned or considered in government agendas and strategies. Consequently, their needs and concerns remain unaddressed, hindering efforts to end violence against women and children within a generation.

Recommendation Details:

Provide government funding to the Young Women’s Alliance (YWA)¹⁶⁰, an ACNC registered charity that supports young women aged 18-28 as they transition from high school into their twenties. YWA will serve as a one-stop-shop providing resources, referrals, and support tailored to the unique challenges faced by this demographic, with special emphasis on young women in rural and regional communities. The organisation will facilitate young women’s development in personal, educational, and professional spheres, ultimately mitigating against gender disadvantage.

YWA Mission: Provide tangible support to young women aged 18-28 during their transition from high school through their twenties, offering resources, referrals, and services tailored to the unique challenges faced by this age group.

Introduction to YWA in High Schools:

- 1) Collaborate with high schools to introduce YWA in Year 11 and 12.
- 2) Distribute brochures and informational packets detailing YWA’s programs.
- 3) Host seminars and webinars featuring young women who have utilised YWA.

Membership Registration: Encourage young women to register with YWA before graduating from high school to receive continuous, life transition support.

¹⁶⁰ Transparency: organisation responsible for commissioning this research and authoring this report.

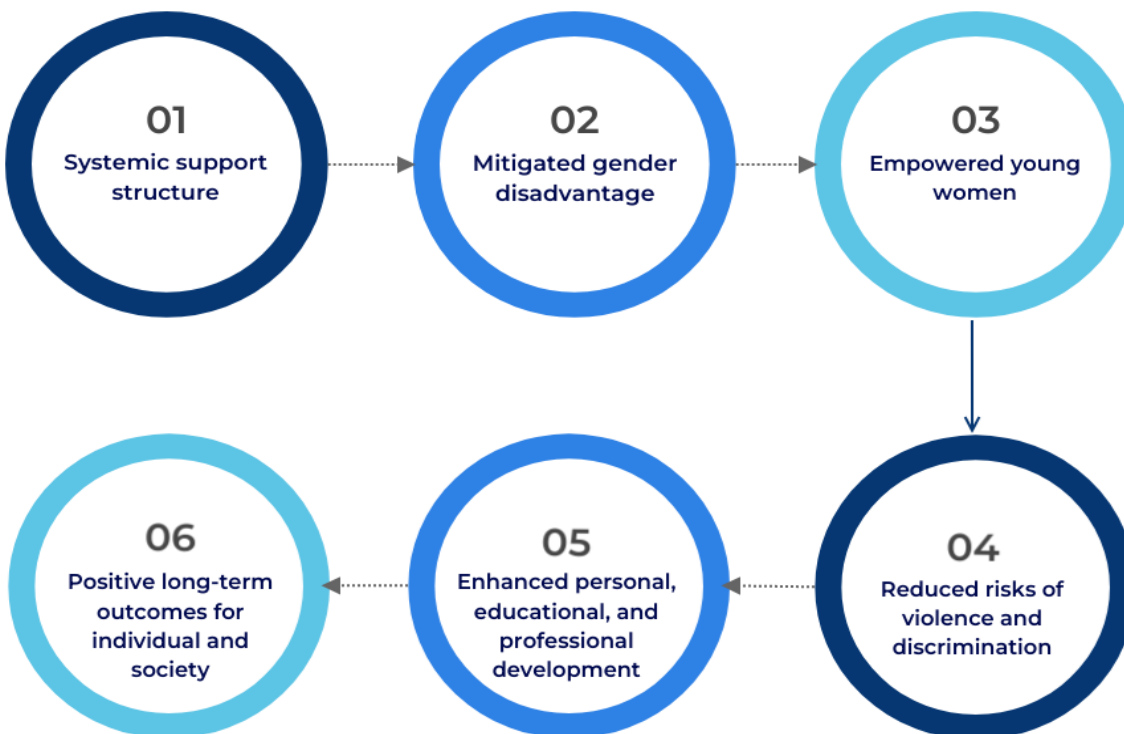
Key Services Provided by YWA:

- Workshops on preventing and minimising harm—sexual, emotional, and physical abuse, sexual assault, IPV, and DFSV.
- Resume building, job search tools, and skills training. Information on further education, scholarships, and online resources.
- Access to counselling services, workshops on stress management, and lifestyle planning.
- Events, workshops, and mentorship programs connecting young women with industry leaders and peers.
- Assistance with understanding legal rights, navigating bureaucratic processes, and advocacy in gender justice issues.
- A community of young women during the critical but tumultuous decade of 18-28.
- Connections to other organisations and services for needs beyond YWA's scope.

Outreach and Accessibility: Accessible website and mobile app that serves as a portal to YWA's resources and community. Collaborate with educational institutions (secondary schools, universities), local businesses, and other NGOs to extend reach and resource availability.

Ongoing Support and Engagement: Monthly newsletters and alerts about new opportunities, resources, and events. Regular surveys to members to assess needs and satisfaction, ensuring the services evolve with the demographic. Create an alumni network to mentor current members and create a feeling of wrap-around support.

Theory of Change:



5.4.8 Implementing Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) Test in Educational and Community Settings

Recommendation:	Implementing Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) Test in Educational and Community Settings
Objective(s):	To implement the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) as a voluntary tool in educational institutions, community organisations, and sporting clubs to identify and address hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes among young men, with the goal of reducing violence against women (VAW) and promoting healthier gender relations.
Target Area:	Secondary and tertiary educational institutions, community organisations, and sporting clubs across Australia, focusing on young men and their attitudes towards gender roles and relationships.
Rationale:	Research shows that both hostile and benevolent sexism contribute to attitudes and behaviours that support violence against women. By introducing the ASI and providing specialised interventions based on the results, this policy aims to mitigate these harmful attitudes before they escalate into violent behaviours. This approach fosters a cultural shift towards gender equity and mutual respect, ultimately enhancing community safety and reducing the prevalence of gender-based violence.
Timeline for Implementation:	18 months

Recommendation Details:

Ambivalent Sexism is a theoretical framework that identifies sexism as consisting of two sub-components: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. This framework posits that sexism can manifest not only in overtly negative ways but also in seemingly positive forms that still reinforce gender inequality.

Hostile Sexism refers to openly negative attitudes and stereotypes about women. It is characterised by beliefs that women are inferior to men, manipulative, or seeking to dominate men through feminist ideologies or sexuality. Hostile sexism often manifests as misogyny, where women are viewed with contempt and subjected to discrimination, harassment, or violence for not conforming to traditional gender roles.

Conversely, Benevolent Sexism involves attitudes that may appear positive but are actually harmful, as they reinforce traditional gender roles and imply that women are weak and in need of protection. While Benevolent Sexism may seem more benign, it ultimately supports gender inequality by placing women in a subordinate position.

Together, these components form ambivalent sexism.

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) is an effective tool for identifying sexist perceptions, attitudes and opinions - allowing for targeted interventions to be implemented to address these before escalation to questionable and/or violent behaviours.

The ASI should be implemented as an optional tool in schools, community organisations, and sporting clubs. The goal is to identify levels of hostile and benevolent sexism among young men and to provide specialised interventions based on these assessments. This aims to mitigate attitudes and behaviours that support violence against women (VAW), fostering healthier gender relations and enhancing community safety.

Meta-analytical research, including data from multiple, peer-reviewed studies over 25 years, has revealed significant correlations between both hostile sexism and benevolent sexism, and VAW.^{161 162 163} Hostile sexism has shown a stronger association with both supportive attitudes toward VAW and actual violent behaviours.¹⁶⁴ Benevolent sexism, while subtler, also significantly contributes to attitudes that may justify, accept, or normalise VAW, especially from a victim-survivor and peer group lens.

This was affirmed in YWA's survey which showed a positive correlation between men with a high ASI score and GBV perpetration.

Implementation of ASI Test

- Introduce the optional ASI Test within secondary and tertiary educational institutions, community organisations, and sports clubs as a voluntary and confidential measure.
- Ensure the test is administered with informed consent, emphasising its confidential and non-punitive nature, aimed only at personal and social betterment.

Specialised Interventions by External Providers

- Contract with external providers specialised in gender studies and psychological interventions to analyse the ASI Test results and to conduct necessary follow-up training and interventions.
- These providers will develop tailored intervention programs based on the sexism profiles identified, which could include psychological interventions, reflective exercises, educational workshops, therapeutic discussions, and individual counselling.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Collect feedback from participants and stakeholders regarding the effectiveness and reception of the test and interventions.

¹⁶¹ Glick, P., Sakallı-Uğurlu, N., Akbaş, G., Metin-Orta, İ., & Ceylan-Batur, S. (2022). Ambivalent sexism and violence toward women: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Social Issues*, 78(3), 679-703. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12481>

¹⁶² Trizna, M., & Rudman, L. A. (2023). *Confronting benevolent sexism: Experimental evidence that non-targets experience interpersonal costs*. *Sexuality & Culture*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-023-10127-6>

¹⁶³ Gravelin, C. R., Biernat, M., & Bucher, C. E. (2024). *Linking ambivalent sexism to violence-against-women attitudes and behaviors: A three-level meta-analytic review*. *Psychological Bulletin*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000414>

¹⁶⁴ Higher School of Economics. (2023, July 23). *How ambivalent sexism harms female workers*. IQ. <https://iq.hse.ru/en/news/799342430.html>

- Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions in changing sexist attitudes and reducing behaviours associated with violence against women. This will be added to the Monitoring and Evaluation Platform (policy recommendation #5.4.3.4). Adjust the program as needed based on empirical evidence and participant feedback.

Implementing the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) Test, followed by specialised interventions provided by external experts, offers a strategic approach to reducing sexism in various community settings. Through this informed and targeted approach, the initiative aims to foster a significant cultural shift towards greater gender equity and mutual respect.



SELF ESTEEM

6.1 The Situation

What does existing research say about young people's, particularly young women's experiences?

6.1.1 Self Esteem

Young women struggle with poor self-esteem and body image.

A 2023 survey revealed that 90% of Australian teenagers aged 12-18 experience some level of body image concern, with 38% being very or extremely concerned.¹⁶⁵ Notably, women, and those in the LGBTQIA+ community reported the highest levels of body dissatisfaction. The study also established a correlation between social media use and increased body dissatisfaction, including a stronger desire for thinness and lower body appreciation. Similarly, a 2018 survey found that over 40% of Australians were unsatisfied with their appearance, with 73% wishing they could change it.¹⁶⁶ 41.5% of respondents also reported frequently comparing themselves to others on social media,¹⁶⁷ a behaviour that can negatively impact self-esteem.

Further, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reports that young women have higher rates of mental health issues compared to their male counterparts. Between 2020 and 2022, 32% of women reported experiencing an anxiety disorder within the past 12 months, significantly higher than the 20% reported by males.¹⁶⁸ This disparity in mental health outcomes is thought to be linked to issues of self-esteem and body image.

Qualitative research provides additional insight into how young Australian women navigate confidence and self-esteem within a sexualised culture. Studies have found that young women struggle to reconcile competing narratives of empowerment and objectification, leading to complex attitudes towards their self-worth.¹⁶⁹ Subsequently, many come to view physical attractiveness as key to being an empowered, successful woman. They may try to ascertain this through sharing sexualised images on social media, wearing sexualised clothing, and experimenting with various diet and skin care regimens.

Poor self-esteem has ramifications for young women's identity formation. According to social identity theory,¹⁷⁰ individuals derive a sense of self from their membership in social groups, which in turn influences their behaviour and self-perception. Young women find themselves navigating gendered

¹⁶⁵ "More than 90% of Young People in Australia Have Some Concern about Their Body Image - Butterfly Foundation." 2023. Butterfly Foundation. July 24, 2023. <https://butterfly.org.au/news/more-than-90-of-young-people-in-australia-have-some-concern-about-their-body-image/>.

¹⁶⁶ "National Survey Finds That More than 1 in 3 Australians Are Unhappy with the Way They Look - Butterfly Foundation." 2020. Butterfly Foundation. May 2, 2020. <https://butterfly.org.au/news/national-survey-finds-that-more-than-1-in-3-australians-are-unhappy-with-the-way-they-look/>.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid

¹⁶⁸ "National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing, 2020-2022." 2024. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Australian Bureau of Statistics. June 5, 2024. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/mental-health/national-study-mental-health-and-wellbeing/latest-release#data-downloads>.

¹⁶⁹ Gill, Rosalind, and Shani Orgad. 2015. "The Confidence Cult(Ure)." *Australian Feminist Studies* 30 (86): 324-44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2016.1148001>.

¹⁷⁰ Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33-47). Brooks/Cole.

scripts and stereotypes that prescribe how they should behave, think, and look. These scripts are reinforced by societal validation and social media posts, where conformity to gender norms is often rewarded with social approval.

Attachment theory¹⁷¹ further elucidates this process by explaining how individuals seek validation and connection, often conforming to societal expectations to secure a sense of belonging. For young women, this can mean adopting roles and behaviours that align with traditional notions of femininity, even if these roles restrict their potential and reinforce inequalities. Without alternative models of womanhood, young women may internalise these scripts as natural, limiting their ability to envision a broader range of possibilities.

The concept of gender schema theory¹⁷² posits that gendered expectations are internalised from a young age, guiding the processing of information and shaping behaviour in ways that reinforce traditional gender roles. To disrupt this cycle, young women must be shown practical examples of womanhood beyond traditional gender norms.

Counter-narratives are crucial. By showcasing women who have successfully transcended gender norms, society can offer young women an array of possibilities. This helps young women imagine and strive for lives unconstrained by traditional gender roles. Social validation of these alternative paths is equally important; young women need to see that these choices are not only possible but also valued and respected by society. Ultimately, a viable, practical counterculture that supports the constructive fashioning of young women's self-esteem is needed.

6.2 Primary Research

What does YWA research, including our survey, interviews, literature reviews, and expert consultations, say about young people's, particularly young women's experience?

6.2.1 Survey Findings

Women report lower self-esteem compared to men, along with a greater desire for confidence and self-assuredness. Women also indicate lower overall happiness and felt more pressure to be nice to others. On a positive note, both men and women express a commitment to being good people, although this was significantly more pronounced among women.

Gender norms and societal expectations disproportionately affect women's self-concept and wellbeing.

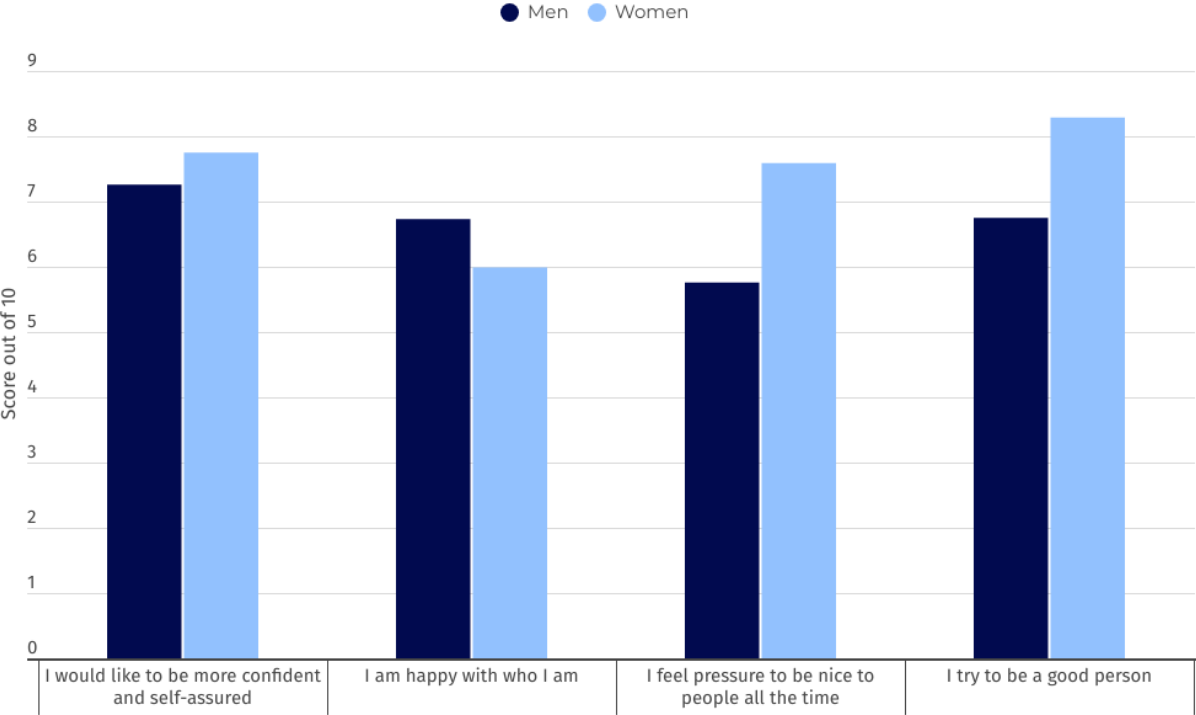
Table 13: Self Esteem by Gender

¹⁷¹ Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Vol. I. Attachment*. Basic Books.

¹⁷² Bem, S. L. (1981). Gender schema theory: A cognitive account of sex typing. *Psychological Review*, 88(4), 354-364.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.88.4.354>

Self Esteem by Gender	Gender Identity	
	Men	Women
I would like to be more confident and self-assured	7.26 (7.00)	7.75 (8.00)
I am happy with who I am	6.73 (7.00)	5.99 (6.00)
I feel pressure to be nice to people all the time	5.76 (6.00)	7.59 (8.00)
I try to be a good person	6.75 (7.00)	8.29 (9.00)

Figure 24: Self Esteem by Gender



6.2.2 Interview Insights

In the interviews, the following themes emerged:

Young Australian women face self-esteem challenges fuelled by societal beauty standards, family expectations, and pervasive social media influences. These pressures, beginning in childhood and persisting into adulthood, manifest as body image issues, mental health struggles, and a persistent sense of inadequacy. Gendered expectations intensify these problems, fostering perfectionism, imposter syndrome, and identity struggles. Additionally, negative interactions and high expectations in relationships and academic settings contribute to diminished self-worth.

Despite advancements in promoting body positivity, deep-rooted cultural and social pressures continue to undermine women's self-perception and overall well-being. Supportive interventions, mental health resources, and positive reinforcement are essential to fostering self-esteem and helping young women navigate these challenges effectively. The pressure to conform to specific appearance standards is particularly acute for women, exacerbated by celebrities who misrepresent their use of cosmetic enhancements. Consequently, body image issues and eating disorders often become mechanisms of control, with women focusing on managing their bodies and food intake, particularly when they face struggles in other areas of their lives.

Social media and pornography further promote unrealistic and unhealthy beauty standards and create expectations for women to perform and derive enjoyment from certain sexual acts. Relationships with negative partners who engage in coercive control and emotional abuse further erode self-worth, often through tactics such as “negging.” Academic pressures, particularly from family and educational institutions, compel young women to base their self-worth entirely on academic performance, leading to unhealthy coping mechanisms and attachment styles.

6.3 Policy Recommendations

Based on these learnings from primary research, YWA recommends the following **targeted policy recommendations** to address the identified issues.

6.3.1 Women’s Book & TikTok Series

Recommendation:	Women’s Book & TikTok Series
Objective(s):	To broaden and redefine the representation of womanhood in contemporary media by creating a women’s book and an accompanying TikTok series that showcases diverse and inspiring role models, empowering young women to envision and pursue lives unconstrained by traditional gender norms.
Target Area:	Young women across Australia, particularly those in their early to mid-teen years (Years 7-9), with outreach through both traditional media (books) and social media platforms (TikTok and Instagram).

Rationale:	<p>The proposed Women’s Book and TikTok series aims to address the profound self-esteem challenges faced by young Australian women by reshaping the narratives they are exposed to. By featuring diverse and influential women, the initiative will provide role models that embody strength, intelligence, and versatility, counteracting the narrow and often detrimental societal standards prevalent in contemporary media.</p> <p>This multifaceted approach leverages the popularity and accessibility of TikTok to engage young audiences, while the book offers a deeper, more reflective exploration of each contributor's journey. The combination of these mediums ensures broad reach and sustained engagement. The initiative can provide timely support and inspiration by targeting developmental periods where self-esteem issues are most acute.</p>
Timeline for Implementation:	6 months

Status Quo:

Counter-narratives are crucial for fostering a broader understanding of womanhood. By showcasing women who have successfully transcended gender norms, society can present young women with a broader array of possibilities. This exposure allows young women to imagine and strive for lives that are not constrained by traditional gender roles. Equally important is the social validation of these alternative paths; young women need to see that these choices are not only attainable but also valued and respected by society.

Currently, young women lack this supportive framework. Instead, they often look to influencers and models as the primary examples of successful womanhood, which can lead to a narrow and unrealistic understanding of success. This perspective is heavily influenced by appearance and social media personas, rather than diverse and substantive achievements. Therefore, a viable, practical counterculture that supports the constructive shaping of young women's self-esteem is urgently needed.

Careful curation of role models during adolescence is essential. Young women need access to diverse, relatable, and inspiring figures who exemplify success across various fields and life experiences. These role models should reflect a broad spectrum of possibilities, demonstrating that womanhood encompasses strength, intelligence, and versatility, rather than being confined to superficial standards.

Recommendation Details:

This policy recommendation supports the creation of a women’s book and an accompanying TikTok series that aims to redefine and broaden the representation of womanhood in contemporary media. The project will feature influential Australian women from diverse backgrounds, sharing their personal stories and insights. This initiative seeks to provide a practical counterculture to prevailing societal norms that often emphasise beauty and sexualisation as primary measures of a woman's relevance. Instead, the focus is on offering narratives that highlight the strength, intelligence, and versatility of women.

Themes:

1. Overcoming societal expectations
2. Career development and breaking glass ceilings
3. Balancing personal life with professional ambitions
4. Health and wellness beyond aesthetics
5. Financial independence and empowerment
6. Leadership in community and societal change
7. Cultural identity and diversity in Australia

Participation: Contributors will be carefully selected influential Australian women who resonate with young women—those whom young women look up to and are informed by, rather than figures predominantly listened to by adults. These contributors will include activists, business leaders, artists, scientists, and other professionals who have made significant impacts in their fields. They will provide personal narratives, advice, lessons learned, and encouragement, tailored to support and inspire young Australian women.

Book Structure:

1. Overview of the project's goals and the importance of diverse role models.
2. Each chapter is authored by a different woman, focusing on her unique journey, challenges, and victories.
3. Practical tips and strategies for young women on navigating similar paths.
4. Lists of helpful resources and organisations for further support.

TikTok Series Strategy:

1. Teaser videos by contributors introducing themselves and the series.
2. Each contributor will create short TikTok videos discussing key moments from their chapters, offering advice, and engaging with followers through Q&A sessions.
3. Encourage viewers to share their own stories and questions using a series hashtag, fostering a community dialogue.
4. Link TikTok content with book chapters for deeper engagement.

Marketing and Distribution:

1. Collaborate with bookstores, libraries, and educational institutions for promotions and pre-orders.
2. Organise a virtual launch with contributors discussing the book and series, moderated by a well-known personality.
3. Utilise Instagram alongside TikTok to broaden reach.
4. Partner with women's organisations, educational bodies, and corporate sponsors who align with the book's ethos.

Targeted Advertising: Advertise the series, particularly on TikTok, targeting key developmental periods, particularly Years 7, 8, and 9.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Utilise social media and direct feedback mechanisms to gauge audience reception and impact. This plan aims to leverage the power of both traditional and new media to reach a broad audience, ensuring that the messages of diverse womanhood resonate across different platforms and demographics.

6.3.2 Embedding Life and Humanist Philosophy in Education Systems

Recommendation:	Embedding Life and Humanist Philosophy in Education Systems
Objective(s):	To integrate life philosophy and humanist philosophy into the educational curriculum, promoting holistic development, self-esteem, and a strong sense of purpose among young women through self-directed learning, critical thinking, and community engagement.
Target Area:	Secondary schools across Australia, with a focus on embedding these philosophical frameworks into the core curriculum for students in years 7-12, ensuring that young women have access to a supportive educational environment that fosters personal growth and self-worth.
Rationale:	Integrating life and humanist philosophy into education fosters self-esteem and holistic growth. Adolescents with a sense of purpose exhibit higher life satisfaction and resilience. Humanist courses instil empathy, compassion, and self-awareness, which are essential for personal development. Community and parental involvement reinforce these values, with community projects fostering real-world impact and social responsibility.
Timeline for Implementation:	12 months

Status Quo:

Young women lack a supportive educational framework that embeds life philosophy and humanist philosophy into the curriculum. Doing so would provide a robust foundation for developing their self-esteem. Research consistently shows that having a sense of purpose is crucial for the healthy development of adolescents.¹⁷³ Purpose, defined as a stable and generalised intention to accomplish something meaningful to oneself and consequential for the world, is significantly lacking in current educational approaches.

Adolescents with a sense of purpose report higher levels of life satisfaction, happiness, and physical health. They also exhibit greater resilience, social connection, and reduced engagement in risky behaviours. However, the existing education systems do not adequately foster this sense of purpose, leaving many young women without the necessary tools to build a strong and positive self-concept.

¹⁷³ Fuligni, A., Burrow, A., Hill, P., Dahl, R., Leve, L., & Williams, J. L. (2023). *Sense of purpose helps adolescent development and resilience*. National Scientific Council on Adolescence, UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent. <https://newsroom.ucla.edu/releases/sense-of-purpose-helps-adolescent-development-resilience>

Humanist philosophy, which emphasises the inherent worth and potential of every individual, is also underrepresented in current educational curricula. This philosophy promotes values such as empathy, compassion, and self-awareness, which are essential for personal growth and self-esteem. By focusing on the positive aspects of human experience and the potential for personal development, humanism can provide young women with an aspirational identity to strive towards.

The absence of these philosophical frameworks means that young women are not receiving the guidance needed to build a strong sense of self-worth and identity. Instead, they are often influenced by superficial standards and social media personas that do not contribute to their long-term well-being.

Recommendation Details:

1. Curriculum Integration

- **Objective:** Integrate life philosophy and humanist philosophy into the core curriculum to promote holistic development.
- **Philosophical Foundations:** Introduce courses on humanistic philosophy, highlighting the works of thinkers like Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. This will help students understand principles such as self-actualisation, intrinsic motivation, and the value of individual dignity.
- **Life Skills Education:** Incorporate life skills education that emphasises critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and emotional intelligence. This aligns with the ideas of John Dewey and Jerome Bruner on meaningful education and constructivist learning.

2. Self-Directed Learning and Self-Evaluation

- **Objective:** Encourage self-directed learning and self-evaluation to foster intrinsic motivation and personal growth.
- **Self-Directed Learning:** Allow students to choose projects and subjects that interest them, fostering a sense of autonomy and passion for learning. This approach aligns with humanistic principles that prioritise individual choice and motivation.
- **Self-Evaluation:** Replace traditional grading systems with self-evaluation practices. Students should regularly assess their progress and set personal goals, fostering a deeper understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement.

3. Safe and Supportive Learning Environments

- **Objective:** Create learning environments that are safe, supportive, and conducive to personal growth.
- **Emotional Safety:** Ensure that classrooms are spaces where students feel emotionally safe and valued. Teachers should be trained to recognise and support the emotional needs of students, promoting a positive self-concept and self-esteem.
- **Peer Support:** Encourage collaborative learning and peer support systems. Group projects and discussions can help students build healthy relationships and learn from diverse perspectives.

4. Community and Parental Involvement

- **Objective:** Engage the community and parents in the educational process to reinforce the values of humanistic education.
- **Community Projects:** Involve students in community service projects that align with humanistic values, such as environmental conservation and social justice initiatives. This

helps students apply their learning in real-world contexts and develop a sense of social responsibility.

6.3.3 Regulating Influencer Content to Protect Young Women and Girls

Recommendation:	Regulating Influencer Content to Protect Young Women and Girls
Objective(s):	To protect the mental health and self-esteem of young women and girls by implementing robust regulatory measures that limit exposure to harmful social media content, including sexualised imagery and traditional gender norms, while enhancing transparency, parental control, and user empowerment.
Target Area:	Social media platforms operating in Australia, with a specific focus on content regulation, user protection for minors, and educational initiatives for parents and guardians. The policy targets young women and girls under the age of 18, aiming to create a safer online environment that promotes positive self-perception and mental well-being.
Rationale:	<p>Regulating influencer content on social media is crucial to safeguarding the mental health and well-being of young women and girls. Influencers shape cultural norms and impact self-perceptions, often promoting unrealistic and harmful ideals. Robust content regulation, including age verification and advanced filtering technologies, can significantly reduce the exposure of minors to detrimental content. Mandatory content warnings and educational labels will help young users make more informed choices about the media they consume.</p> <p>Enhanced reporting mechanisms and dedicated moderation teams ensure that inappropriate content is swiftly addressed, protecting young users from harmful influences. Parental controls and educational resources further empower parents to monitor and guide their children's media consumption.</p>
Timeline for Implementation:	36 months

Status Quo:

Social media influencers have reshaped cultural norms, significantly impacting the self-esteem of young women and girls. Influencers often promote sexualised content and traditional gender norms, which negatively affect the mental health and self-perception of young audiences. Despite increasing awareness of these issues, current regulatory frameworks fail to adequately address these harmful impacts. Young women and girls are regularly exposed to content that perpetuates harmful stereotypes and unrealistic body standards, resulting in higher rates of anxiety, depression, and body dissatisfaction.

Recommendation Details:

To address the adverse effects of influencer content on young women and girls, it is essential to implement robust regulatory measures. Drawing on the UK's experience with social media regulation,

particularly The Children's Code, and insights from recent research, this policy aims to create a safer online environment for young women and children.

1. Content Regulation and Filtering

- **Objective:** Limit the exposure of young women and children to sexualised and traditional gender norm content by implementing stringent content regulation and filtering mechanisms.
- **Age Verification Systems:** Social media platforms must implement robust age verification systems to ensure that users under 18 cannot access content flagged as sexualised or promoting traditional gender norms. This can be achieved through technologies such as facial recognition and verification of government-issued IDs.
- **Content Filtering:** Platforms should use advanced machine learning algorithms to detect and filter out content deemed inappropriate for minors. This includes sexualised imagery, language, and content that reinforces harmful gender stereotypes.

2. Mandatory Content Warnings and Labels

- **Objective:** Ensure that young users are aware of the nature of the content they are consuming.
- **Content Warnings:** Require automatic, clear content warnings on posts that contain sexualised content or traditional gender norms. This helps young users make informed decisions about the content they engage with.
- **Educational Labels:** Introduce educational labels that provide context about the potential impact of certain types of content on self-esteem and body image.

3. Enhanced Reporting and Moderation Tools

- **Objective:** Empower users to report inappropriate content and ensure swift action is taken by platforms.
- **User Reporting Mechanisms:** Strengthen user reporting mechanisms to make it easier for young users and their guardians to report content that violates guidelines.
- **Moderation Teams:** Require platforms to maintain dedicated moderation teams that can promptly review and act on reported content.

4. Parental Controls and Education

- **Objective:** Equip parents with the tools and knowledge to protect their children from harmful content.
- **Parental Control Features:** Social media platforms should offer robust parental control features that allow parents to monitor and restrict their children's access to certain types of content.
- **Educational Resources:** Provide parents with educational resources on the impact of social media content on young people's self-esteem and how to guide their children in responsible media consumption.

Citing the UK's Efforts:

The UK's Children's Code,¹⁷⁴ also known as the Age Appropriate Design Code, has been a significant step in regulating social media to protect children. Since coming into full effect in 2021, social media

¹⁷⁴ Information Commissioner's Office. (2020). *Age appropriate design: A code of practice for online services*. Information Commissioner's Office. <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/childrens-information/childrens-code-guidance-and-resources/>

companies have made nearly 100 changes to improve online safety for kids. These changes include filtering comments considered to be bullying, turning off autoplay by default for YouTube Kids, and implementing age verification systems to prevent underage users from accessing inappropriate content. The UK's approach of requiring tech companies to alter their products rather than just providing warnings has contributed to a safer online environment for children.

Key Provisions of the Code

The Children's Code requires companies to:

- **Prioritise Child Welfare:** Online services must consider the best interests of children in their design and data practices.
- **High Privacy Settings by Default:** Services must offer the highest level of privacy settings by default for children.
- **Minimise Data Collection:** Companies are required to collect the minimum amount of data necessary for their services and avoid unnecessary data collection.
- **Prohibit Manipulative Tactics:** The use of manipulative tactics to encourage children to provide more personal data is prohibited.
- **Transparency and Communication:** Privacy information and terms of service must be clear and understandable to children, with child-friendly explanations and just-in-time notices.

Effectiveness of the Code

Since its implementation, the Children's Code has led to significant changes in how major tech platforms handle child users:

- **TikTok:** Restricted sharing options and disabled bedtime notifications for users under 18.
- **Google:** Enabled parents and children to request the removal of images from search results and disabled location history for children.
- **YouTube:** Updated default privacy settings and turned off autoplay for users aged 13-17.
- **Facebook:** Exempted users under 18 from targeted advertising and provided tighter default sharing settings.

These changes indicate a positive impact on enhancing children's digital privacy and safety. However, the full extent of the Code's effectiveness will require ongoing assessment as companies continue to adapt their practices.

Challenges in Regulating Social Media

Despite its positive impact, the Children's Code faces several challenges in regulating social media:

1. **Effective Age Verification:** Implementing robust age verification systems is complex. Companies must balance privacy concerns with the need to accurately identify child users.
2. **Algorithm Accountability:** Ensuring that algorithms do not recommend harmful content to children is a significant challenge. Social media platforms must design algorithms that filter out or downrank harmful content while allowing children to provide feedback on what they see.

3. **Compliance and Enforcement:** Ensuring consistent compliance across all platforms is difficult. Some companies may find it challenging to adapt their global operations to meet the specific requirements of the Children's Code.
4. **Balancing Privacy and Safety:** Protecting children's data while providing them with safe and engaging online experiences requires careful consideration. Companies must avoid overly restrictive measures that could limit children's access to beneficial online resources.



HEALTH

7.1 The Situation

What does existing research say about young people's, particularly young women's experiences?

There is a concerning trend in psychological distress among young adults, particularly young women. 20% of individuals aged 18-24 experienced high or very high psychological distress; young women were approximately twice as likely to experience these elevated levels compared to young men (28% vs 13%).¹⁷⁵ Analogously, there is a clear trend over the past two decades of increasing psychological distress among young people, particularly young women. Psychological distress levels for women aged 18-25 years have risen sharply since 2001.¹⁷⁶

This is consistent with global observations of the “loss of the U-shaped curve of happiness.” Research by David Blanchflower and Bryson Xiaowei Xu suggests that happiness levels now start low in young adulthood and increase with age, reversing the traditional U-shaped curve. By 2023, their studies indicate, young women aged 18-25, reported the most frequent mental health challenges.¹⁷⁷

The reasons for this global happiness shift are multifaceted. Universal elements affecting young people include increased social media use, economic uncertainties, global crises, and heightened awareness of societal issues.¹⁷⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic has likely exacerbated these trends, although the decline in young adult well-being predates the pandemic.¹⁷⁹ Additionally, gender-specific factors play a significant role: young women experience mental health problems at two to three times the rate of young men, with domestic and sexual abuse being key contributors. Concerningly, women have higher rates of recent self-harm (2.2%) and self-harm over their lifetime (10.4%) compared to men (1.2% recently and 6.8% over their lifetime).¹⁸¹

The implications are significant. The Productivity Commission's 2020 report estimated that mental illness and suicide cost the Australian economy between \$43 billion and \$70 billion per year, encompassing direct health costs, lost productivity, and other indirect costs.¹⁸² Additionally, the report indicated an annual cost of \$150 billion due to diminished health and reduced life expectancy for those living with mental illness.¹⁸³ In 2021-22, approximately \$12.2 billion in real government recurrent expenditure was

¹⁷⁵ “National Health Survey, 2022.” 2024. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Australian Bureau of Statistics. June 25, 2024. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/health-conditions-and-risks/national-health-survey/latest-release>.

¹⁷⁶ “HILDA Data Shows Psychological Distress Rising, Loneliness Highest amongst Young People.” 2024. Newsroom. February 12, 2024. <https://www.unimelb.edu.au/newsroom/news/2024/february/hilda-data-shows-psychological-distress-rising,-loneliness-highest-amongst-young-people>.

¹⁷⁷ Renée Onque. 2024. “Young People Today Are Stressed, Depressed—and Changing the Fundamental Pattern of Happiness, New Research Shows.” CNBC. CNBC. July 23, 2024. <https://www.cnbc.com/2024/07/23/new-research-young-people-are-reshaping-the-happiness-curve.html>.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid

¹⁷⁹ Ibid

¹⁸⁰ “HILDA Data Shows Psychological Distress Rising, Loneliness Highest amongst Young People.” 2024. Newsroom. February 12, 2024. <https://www.unimelb.edu.au/newsroom/news/2024/february/hilda-data-shows-psychological-distress-rising,-loneliness-highest-amongst-young-people>.

¹⁸¹ “National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing, 2020-2022.” 2024. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Australian Bureau of Statistics. June 5, 2024. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/mental-health/national-study-mental-health-and-wellbeing/latest-release>.

¹⁸² “Productivity Commission Inquiry Report.” n.d. <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health/report/mental-health-volume1.pdf>.

¹⁸³ Ibid

allocated to mental health services, equivalent to \$472 per person.¹⁸⁴ Poor mental health is also linked to chronic physical conditions, further straining public health systems. Communities experiencing high levels of mental health distress often face increased rates of crime, substance abuse, and homelessness, compounded by stigma and lack of access to care.¹⁸⁵

Gender also intersects with physical health disadvantage.

7.1.1 Rise in Sexually Transmissible Infections (STIs)

Recent research indicates a concerning rise in sexually transmissible infections (STIs) particularly among young women. Overall, syphilis rates have tripled, gonorrhoea diagnoses have doubled, and chlamydia cases have increased by 12% since 2013.¹⁸⁶ Young women are disproportionately affected by STIs. For example, more than two-thirds of chlamydia cases occur in people aged 15–29 years and it is estimated that 1 in 27 young women in Australia had chlamydia at some point in 2022, with less than half being diagnosed.¹⁸⁷ There has also been a six-fold increase in syphilis diagnoses among females over the past decade, which is especially concerning due to the risk of congenital syphilis in pregnancies.¹⁸⁸ The increase in STI rates is occurring against a backdrop of decreased testing, with a decline in Medicare-rebated tests for chlamydia and gonorrhoea among both men and women between 2019 and 2022 (attributable, in part, to the COVID-19 pandemic).¹⁸⁹

7.1.2 Chronic Health Conditions

56% of Australian women have 1 or more of the 10 selected chronic conditions, and women lose more healthy years of life from living with disease and injury (58%) than from dying prematurely (42%).¹⁹⁰ Women also experience a greater share than men of the total burden from some disease groups including reproductive & maternal conditions (94%), blood & metabolic disorders (which includes iron-deficiency anaemia) (59%), neurological conditions (which includes dementia) (57%), and musculoskeletal conditions (56%).¹⁹¹

7.1.3 Delayed Diagnoses

Women experience delays in the diagnosis of sexual and reproductive health conditions like endometriosis and polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS). On average, endometriosis takes between 6 and 8

¹⁸⁴ “Expenditure - Mental Health.” 2024. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. June 11, 2024. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/mental-health/topic-areas/expenditure>.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid

¹⁸⁶ UNSW Kirby Institute. 2022. “HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexually Transmissible Infections in Australia Annual Surveillance Report 2022 HIV.” <https://doi.org/10.26190/sx44-5366>.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid

¹⁸⁸ Ibid

¹⁸⁹ Ibid

¹⁹⁰ “The Health of Australia’s Females, How Healthy Are Australia’s Females?” 2023. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. June 27, 2023. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/men-women/female-health/contents/how-healthy>.

¹⁹¹ Ibid

years from onset of symptoms to diagnosis.¹⁹² This is because women's pain is often dismissed or underestimated, prolonging suffering and causing complications.¹⁹³ For example, there were around 44,000 endometriosis-related hospitalisations in Australia, with 82% of these among females aged 15-44 years.¹⁹⁴

Economic disadvantage compounds these health issues. The World Health Organisation (WHO) highlights a clear social gradient in health outcomes: lower socioeconomic status correlates with poorer health. This gradient persists across all countries. The WHO estimates that social determinants account for 30-55% of health outcomes. Factors such as income, education, employment, housing, and social inclusion impact health more significantly than healthcare or individual lifestyle choices alone.¹⁹⁵

7.2 Primary Research

What does YWA research, including our survey, interviews, literature reviews, and expert consultations, say about young people’s, particularly young women's experience?

7.2.1 Survey Findings

In the survey, men report feeling better informed about their reproductive health, experiencing better mental health over the past year, and feeling heard when presenting their medical concerns. Conversely, women report being less adequately informed about their reproductive health, experiencing poorer mental health, and lacking confidence that their medical concerns are taken seriously.

This discrepancy demonstrates the challenges and disadvantages women face in receiving adequate health information, proper medical care, and maintaining mental health.

Table 14: Health by Gender

Health by Gender Variable	Gender Identity	
	Men	Women
I feel adequately informed about my reproductive health	6.62 (7.00)	5.53 (5.00)

¹⁹² “Endometriosis, Endometriosis.” 2023. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. December 14, 2023. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/chronic-disease/endometriosis-in-australia/contents/endometriosis>.

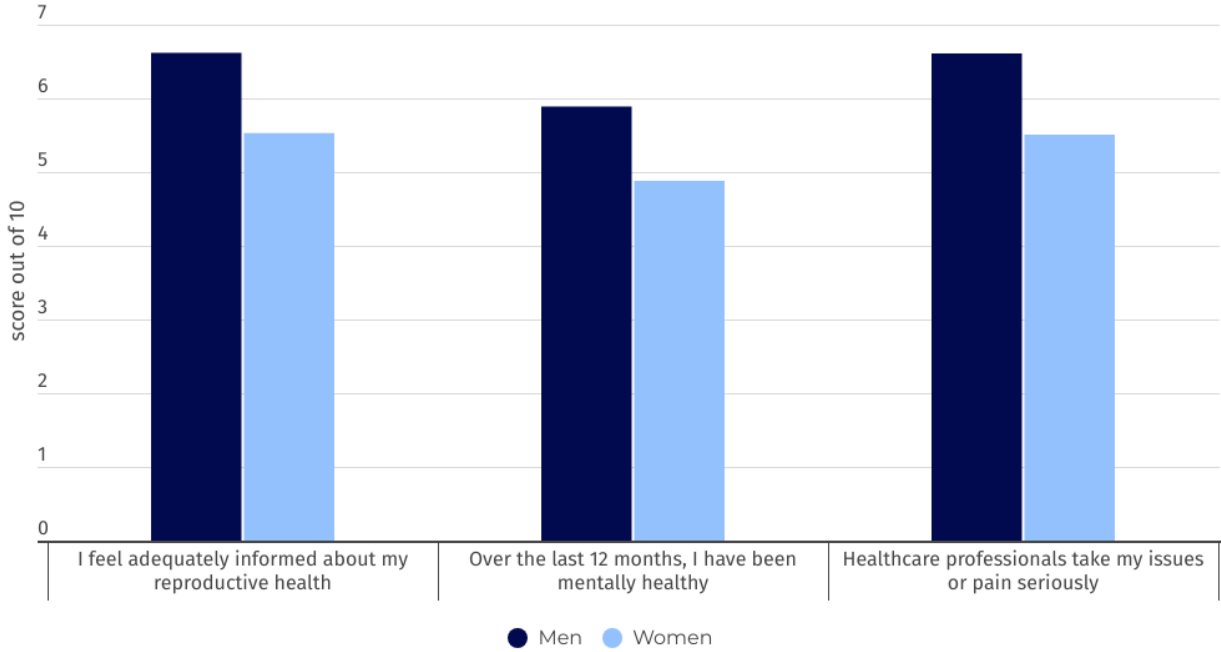
¹⁹³ Weckesser, Annalise. 2023. “Women’s Pain Is Often Not Believed – Here’s How to Make Your Voice Heard When Seeking Help.” The Conversation. September 12, 2023. <https://theconversation.com/womens-pain-is-often-not-believed-heres-how-to-make-your-voice-heard-when-seeking-help-207866>.

¹⁹⁴ “The Health of Australia’s Females, How Healthy Are Australia’s Females?” 2023. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. June 27, 2023. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/men-women/female-health/contents/how-healthy>.

¹⁹⁵ World Health Organization. *Social determinants of health*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health>

Over the last 12 months, I have been mentally healthy	5.89 (6.00)	4.88 (5.00)
Healthcare professionals take my issues or pain seriously	6.61 (7.00)	5.51 (6.00)

Figure 25: Health by Gender



The YWA survey further underscores systemic inequities in health. In city areas, 83.5% of women recognise the existence of at least one health-related problem, compared to 82.7% in remote and regional areas.

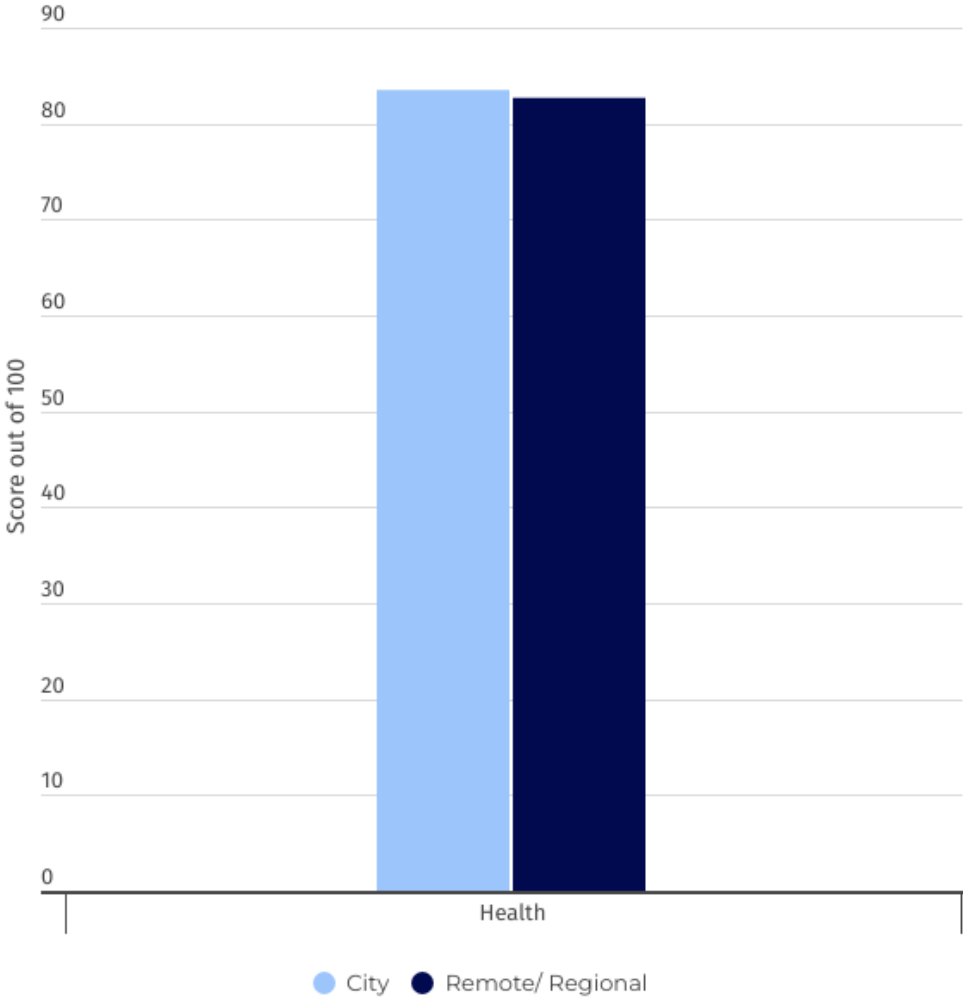
Systemic inequities refer to institutionalised patterns and practices that lead to unequal access to resources, opportunities, and outcomes based on characteristics such as gender, race, or socioeconomic status. In the health context, these inequities manifest as disparities in access to healthcare information, quality of medical care, and overall health outcomes, disproportionately affecting certain groups.

Table 15: Prevalence of Structural Inequities (% of women who agreed on the relevance of at least one problem in the domain)

Prevalence of Structural Inequities (% of women who agreed on the relevance of at least one problem in the domain)	Area (current)
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Variable	City	Remote/Regional
Health	83.5%	82.7%

Figure 26: Prevalence of Structural Inequities (% of women who agreed on the relevance of at least one problem in the domain)



Examining particular domains highlights the extent of these systemic health disparities.

Health-Related Barriers: Menstruation interferes significantly with education and jobs, slightly more in city areas (43.3%) than in remote/regional regions (41.7%).

Reproductive Health Information: A higher percentage of women in remote/regional areas (35.4%) report inadequate information about reproductive health compared to those in cities (33.4%).

Financial Education Access: City and remote/regional women equally perceive gender negatively impacting their access to financial education (31.5%).

Access to Emergency Contraception: Interestingly negative experiences in accessing the morning-after pill are slightly more prevalent in cities (31.2%) than in remote/regional areas (28.3%).

Healthcare Professional Attitudes: A notable difference exists in the perception of healthcare professionals not taking women’s issues or pain seriously, with remote/regional women (37.3%) feeling this more strongly than their city counterparts (27.4%).

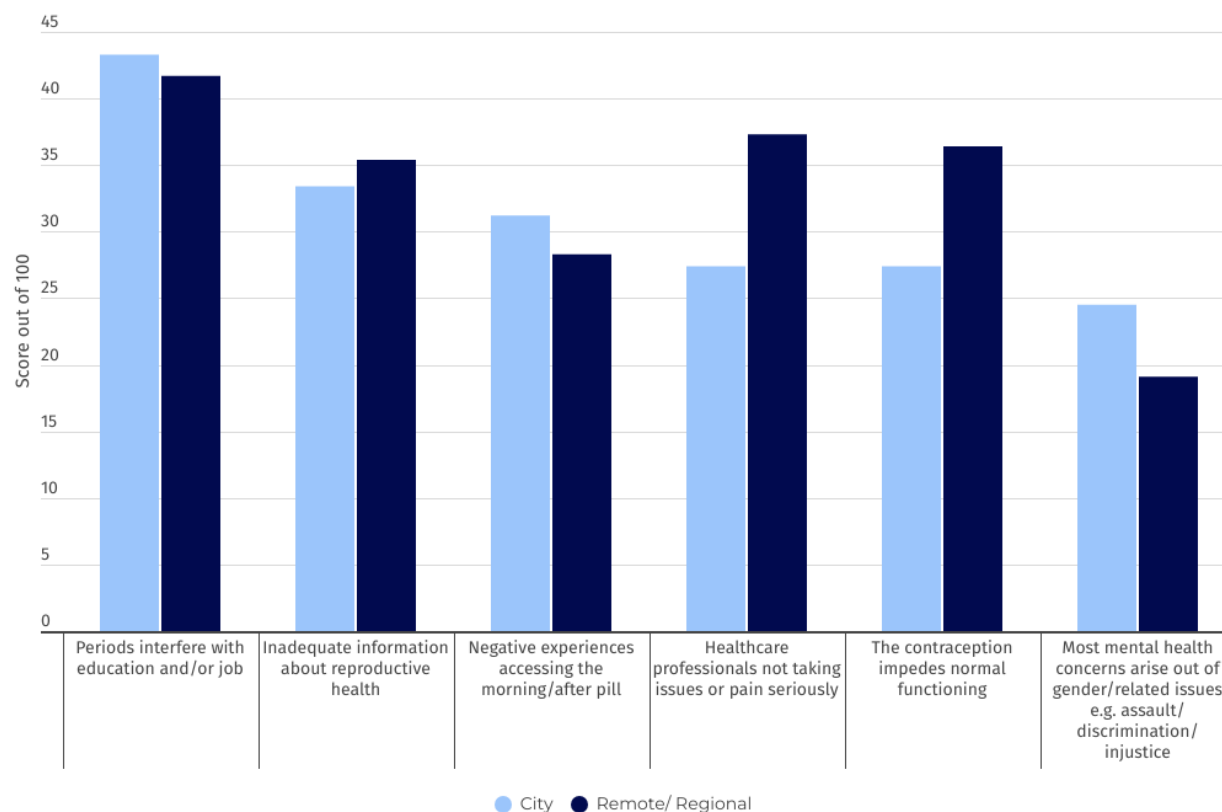
Contraception Side Effects: Women in remote/regional areas report higher negative impacts of contraception on normal functioning (36.4%) compared to those in cities (27.4%).

Mental Health Concerns: Gender-related issues such as assault, discrimination, and injustice are seen as primary causes of mental health concerns more in cities (24.5%) than in remote/regional areas (19.1%).

Table 16: Prevalence of Structural Inequities (% of women who agreed (rating 6-10 out of 10) that the problem exists)

Prevalence of Structural Inequities (% of women who agreed (rating 6-10 out of 10) that the problem exists)	Area (current)	
	Major city	Remote/Regional
Periods interfere with education and/or job	43.3%	41.7%
Inadequate information about reproductive health	33.4%	35.4%
Negative experiences accessing the morning/after pill	31.2%	28.3%
Healthcare professionals not taking issues or pain seriously	27.4%	37.3%
The contraception impedes normal functioning	27.4%	36.4%
Most mental health concerns arise out of gender/related issues e.g. assault/ discrimination/ injustice	24.5%	19.1%

Figure 27: Prevalence of Structural Inequities (% of women who agreed (rating 6-10 out of 10) that the problem exists)



7.2.2 Interview Insights

Young women highlighted four thematic challenges, organised by summary of main points, representative quotes, words most mentioned, problems most mentioned, and solutions most mentioned.

7.2.2.1 Theme 1: Mental Health Challenges

Summary of main points:

1. Young Australian women face significant mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and stress, which are interrelated and compound each other.
2. Societal pressures, such as unrealistic beauty standards and expectations of success, combined with academic demands and personal health issues, exacerbate mental health challenges.
3. Access to mental health services is limited due to high costs, long waiting lists, and inadequate support systems, particularly in rural areas.
4. Gender-specific issues, such as imposter syndrome in professional settings and gender dysphoria for transgender and non-binary individuals, contribute significantly to mental health problems.
5. There's a pressing need for more diverse representation in mental health professions to better understand and address the unique challenges faced by women from various backgrounds.
6. The financial burden of seeking mental health treatment often forces women to spread out their therapy sessions, potentially reducing the effectiveness of treatment.

Representative quotes:

1. “There's a lot of things that are affecting my mental health and a lot of it does actually have to do with my being a woman.”
2. “I had mental breakdowns because of sexual violence and sexist comments which affected my work, my job, my friendships, everything. I couldn't escape it.”
3. “I wish there were more diverse people in the psychological, mental health fields.”
4. “I had to spread the psych sessions out from two weeks to four weeks, because otherwise it was a huge financial burden.”
5. “Gender affects everything, my education, my health, my relationships, being in society, not feeling like I matter, worrying what I look like, having to behave a certain way, experiencing violence. I sometimes curse being a woman. It's the biggest factor in my lifelong mental health challenges and self harming.”

Words most mentioned:

Unaffordable healthcare
Targeted recruitment
Therapy
Unhealthy coping mechanisms
Scholarships
Mental health
Dysphoria
Imposter syndrome

Problems most mentioned:

1. Limited access to affordable and timely mental health services, particularly in rural areas
2. Inadequate support systems for women's specific mental health needs
3. Significant impact of gender-specific issues like imposter syndrome and gender dysphoria on mental well-being
4. Lack of diversity in mental health professionals, leading to potential misunderstandings or ineffective treatment
5. High financial burden of mental health treatment, forcing women to compromise on care
6. Over reliance on physical exercise as a coping mechanism for mental health, potentially leading to unhealthy habits

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Increase government subsidies for mental health services to make them more affordable and accessible
2. Promote and support diversity in mental health professions through scholarships and targeted recruitment

3. Early education programs on consent, respect, and mental health awareness starting from primary school
4. Telehealth options for mental health services to improve accessibility, especially in rural areas
5. Create specialised frameworks and training for mental health professionals to better address women's unique mental health challenges

7.2.2.2 Theme 2: Access to Healthcare

Summary of main points:

1. Young Australian women face significant barriers in accessing affordable and comprehensive healthcare, with issues ranging from high costs to limited availability of services.
2. High out-of-pocket costs and limited bulk-billing GP availability create substantial financial obstacles, particularly for low-income women or those with chronic conditions requiring frequent care.
3. Mental health services, reproductive health care, and culturally competent care are often inaccessible due to long waiting lists, geographic limitations, or lack of specialised providers.
4. Marginalised groups, such as LGBTQIA+ individuals and women from diverse cultural backgrounds, face additional challenges in accessing appropriate and sensitive care.
5. Telehealth services offer some relief, particularly for rural women or those with mobility issues, but are not suitable for all medical needs and may lack the personal touch of in-person consultations.
6. There's a strong call for increased government funding to improve healthcare accessibility, including subsidies for essential women's health services and products.

Representative quotes:

1. “We need free menstrual products, abortion access, and birth control, and birth control with less side effects.”
2. “My gender has severely negatively affected the health care I receive.”
3. “It's extremely costly to go through the private sector.”
4. “When my partner looks at health insurance plans for what he needs to be covered for, it's basically half what I have to get, I have to be covered for things like pregnancy and termination.”
5. “Aboriginal women need Aboriginal health care providers.”
6. “[Being Aboriginal] has affected the health care I receive.”

Words most mentioned:

Delays
LGBTQIA+
Free menstrual products
Aboriginal^{Costs}
Private sector
Bulk-billing
Pregnancy

Problems most mentioned:

1. High out-of-pocket costs for healthcare services, particularly for women-specific health needs
2. Limited availability of bulk-billing GPs, leading to delayed or avoided care
3. Inadequate access to specialised care for marginalised groups, including LGBTQIA+ individuals and Aboriginal women
4. Lack of culturally competent healthcare, resulting in misunderstandings and suboptimal care
5. Insufficient coverage for women's specific health needs in both public and private healthcare systems
6. Limited suitability of telehealth for all healthcare needs, particularly for physical examinations or sensitive discussions

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Increase government funding for healthcare services, particularly those targeting women's health
2. Improve healthcare provider training on cultural competence and LGBTQIA+ health issues
3. Expand subsidised healthcare services, including free or low-cost access to essential women's health products and services
4. Free period products, abortion services, and birth control to reduce financial barriers to reproductive health
5. Enhance telehealth services where appropriate, ensuring privacy and security for sensitive health discussions
6. Implement programs to increase the number of Aboriginal healthcare workers and culturally sensitive care options

7.2.2.3 Theme 3: Women's Health, Reproductive Autonomy, and Chronic Pain Management

Summary of main points:

1. Young Australian women face challenges regarding women's health, reproductive autonomy, and chronic pain management. Issues such as endometriosis, PCOS, and chronic menstrual pain are severely under-researched and dismissed by the medical community. This leads to inadequate

treatment options and poor medical understanding. Consequently, women report that their symptoms are not taken seriously by healthcare providers, resulting in delayed diagnoses and inadequate treatment.

2. Reproductive autonomy must also be improved. Women feel pressure regarding birth control and reproductive choices. There is also a limited understanding and research into contraception which does not cause severe side effects. Access to affordable and effective contraception, comprehensive sexual health education, and respect for reproductive rights are critical needs.
3. Additionally, chronic illnesses like migraines, pelvic pain, endometriosis, and fibromyalgia cause significant challenges in daily life, careers, and relationships. The financial burden of managing these conditions, along with inadequate pain management and lack of social support, furthers the distress and uncertainty faced by women.

Representative quotes:

1. "I think there definitely needs to be more research in the areas of PCOS, endometriosis, chronic illness, and autoimmune disease."
2. "One of the main things that I see as a health professional affecting Aboriginal women is sexual health."
3. "I've had a friend who has endometriosis who has been repeatedly encouraged by GPs to have a baby because they said it would help her in some way and she doesn't want to have kids."
4. "Women are living in chronic pain and it's not being fixed."
5. "It's extremely costly to go through the private sector."
6. "Birth control is pushed on young teens without discussion."
7. "Free period products, abortion, health care and birth control."
8. "Where my partner looks at health insurance plans for what he needs to be covered for, it's basically half because I have to be, or at least I want to be covered for stuff like pregnancy and termination"

Words most mentioned:

Contraception
Chronic pain
Pressure
Aboriginal women
Endometriosis
Reproductive autonomy
Pelvic pain
High cost

Problems most mentioned:

- Insufficient research funding and attention given to women's health issues, particularly reproductive health conditions.
- Dismissal of women's pain and symptoms by healthcare providers, leading to delayed diagnoses and inadequate treatment.
- Pressure to use birth control or have children against personal wishes, undermining reproductive autonomy.
- Inadequate sexual health education, especially in rural areas and for Aboriginal communities.
- Limited access to affordable and effective contraception options.
- Lack of respect for reproductive autonomy in healthcare settings, including pressure to have children or denial of desired procedures.
- Significant impact of chronic illness on career progression and financial independence.
- High costs associated with managing chronic health conditions, including private healthcare and out-of-pocket expenses.
- Lack of social support and understanding for those with invisible chronic illnesses, leading to isolation and mental health challenges.

Solutions most mentioned:

- Significantly increase funding for women's health research, particularly in areas like endometriosis and PCOS.
- Improve medical education on women's health issues to ensure healthcare providers take women's symptoms seriously.
- Develop better diagnostic tools and treatment options for conditions like endometriosis through targeted research.
- Enhance respect for women's reproductive choices in healthcare settings through improved training and guidelines for healthcare providers.
- Provide free or heavily subsidised contraception options, including long-acting reversible contraceptives.
- Improve comprehensive sexual health education in schools, with special focus on rural areas and culturally appropriate programs for Aboriginal communities.
- Implement workplace policies to accommodate chronic health needs, such as flexible working hours and remote work options.
- Reduce financial burdens associated with chronic illness management through increased subsidies and coverage in public healthcare.
- Enhance public awareness and understanding of women's chronic health issues to reduce stigma and increase social support.

7.2.2.4 Theme 4: Doctor-Patient Interactions and Healthcare System Biases

Summary of main points:

1. Young women feel healthcare professionals dismiss their concerns, leading to a lack of trust and potentially missed diagnoses.

2. There are significant challenges in obtaining accurate diagnoses and appropriate treatments, with women's symptoms often being attributed to stress or hormonal issues without proper investigation.
3. Women frequently encounter scepticism and condescension from both male and female doctors, suggesting a systemic issue rather than individual bias.
4. Systemic misogyny in the healthcare system results in inadequate treatment and lack of appropriate medical research focused on women's health issues.
5. Cultural insensitivity exacerbates challenges, particularly for women of colour and those from diverse backgrounds, who may face both gender and racial biases in healthcare settings.
6. The dismissal of women's pain and health concerns can lead to serious consequences, including delayed treatment for life-threatening conditions.

Representative quotes:

1. "My pain was just dismissed by the doctor. They said, 'I'm sure it's not that bad' even when I kept saying how I couldn't function and couldn't get out of bed."
2. "My appendix burst and they just brushed me off and sent me home when my appendix had ruptured because I had had endometriosis surgery and they just saw it as that."
3. "I've been told, 'oh you make eye contact so you're not autistic and you don't need support.'"
4. "Women are living in chronic pain and it's not being fixed."
5. "Where my partner looks at health insurance plans for what he needs to be covered for, it's basically half that because I have to be, or at least I want to be covered for stuff like pregnancy and termination"

Words most mentioned:

Systemic
 Condescension
 Misdiagnosis
 Dismissal of pain
 Cultural sensitivity
 Aboriginal practitioners
 Underresearched

Problems most mentioned:

1. Dismissal of women's pain and symptoms by healthcare professionals, leading to delayed or missed diagnoses

2. Systemic biases in the healthcare system resulting in inadequate treatment and research for women's health issues
3. Lack of cultural sensitivity in healthcare, particularly affecting women from diverse backgrounds
4. Misdiagnosis or delayed diagnosis due to gender biases and stereotypes about women's health
5. Insufficient understanding of women's health issues among healthcare providers, including conditions like endometriosis and autism in women
6. Lack of trust between women patients and healthcare professionals due to repeated experiences of dismissal

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Mandatory training for healthcare providers on gender bias, cultural competency, and women's health issues
2. Increase awareness and education about women's health issues in medical schools and continuing education programs
3. Advocate for policy changes to address healthcare disparities and increase funding for women's health research
4. Provide support from Aboriginal healthcare workers for Aboriginal women to ensure culturally appropriate care
5. Improve diagnostic processes to account for gender-specific health issues and presentations of conditions in women
6. Encourage more women and individuals from diverse backgrounds to enter healthcare professions to improve representation

7.3 Policy Recommendations

Based on these learnings from primary research, YWA recommends the following **targeted policy recommendations** to address the identified issues.

7.3.1 Health Interventions to Mitigate GBV Perpetration and Exposure

YWA's original time progression analysis of GBV (Gender-Based Violence) perpetration and exposure reveals the critical intersections between health and increased risk/likelihood through several key correlations. By understanding these correlations, we can identify precise intervention points and methods to mitigate these risks effectively within the health context. These interventions align with broader strategies for gender equality, emphasising collective action from healthcare providers and communities. Additionally, these interventions have significant benefits for overall public health, fostering a more inclusive, respectful, and supportive environment.

Relevant Correlations

For Men

- High levels of personal and mental health distress are strongly correlated with an increased likelihood of GBV perpetration.

- Men who report that their mental health challenges interfere with their daily functioning are more likely to engage in GBV.
- Men whose mental health concerns arise primarily from gender-related issues, such as the pressure to conform to traditional masculine roles, are more prone to perpetrate GBV.

For Women

- Women whose mental health concerns arise from gender-related issues, including assault, discrimination, and injustice, have a higher likelihood of GBV exposure.
- Women who have been physically healthy over the past 12 months show a negative correlation with GBV exposure, indicating better physical health is associated with lower GBV risk.
- Women who have been mentally healthy over the past 12 months also show a negative correlation with GBV exposure, suggesting that better mental health is linked to reduced GBV risk.

Intervention Points

1. Early Health Interventions
 - During childhood and adolescence
2. Routine Health Check-ups
 - Regular intervals throughout life
3. Periods of Mental or Physical Health Decline
 - Times of increased stress, illness, or significant life changes
4. Incident Response
 - Immediately following reports of GBV or significant health issues

Intervention Methods

For Men

1. Promoting Mental Health Awareness
 - Provide education on mental health and its impact on overall well-being.
 - Use community health centres and online platforms to disseminate information through workshops, seminars, and social media campaigns.
2. Accessible Mental Health Services
 - Offer easily accessible mental health services, including counselling and support groups.
 - Partner with local health providers to offer low-cost or free services in community centres and clinics.
3. Addressing Gender-Related Mental Health Issues
 - Create support groups and counselling services specifically addressing the mental health issues arising from gender-related pressures.
 - Use existing mental health infrastructure to provide targeted support, facilitated by trained professionals.
4. Routine Mental Health Check-ups
 - Encourage regular mental health check-ups as part of routine healthcare.

- Integrate mental health assessments into standard medical check-ups, promoting early detection and intervention.

For Women

1. Support for Gender-Related Mental Health Challenges
 - Establish support groups and counselling services focusing on mental health issues arising from gender-related discrimination and injustice.
 - Provide these services through community health centres and online platforms, ensuring accessibility and anonymity.
2. Promoting Physical and Mental Health
 - Encourage regular physical and mental health check-ups to monitor and maintain overall well-being.
 - Partner with healthcare providers to offer comprehensive health check-ups at community centres and clinics.
3. Educational Programs on Health and Well-being
 - Offer workshops and resources on maintaining physical and mental health, with a focus on the impacts of gender-related issues.
 - Integrate these programs into community events and school curriculums, using volunteer educators and online resources.
4. Incident Response and Support
 - Provide immediate support and counselling following reports of GBV or significant health issues.
 - Ensure that healthcare providers are trained to offer appropriate support and referrals, and establish hotlines for immediate assistance.

By implementing these targeted and deployable interventions within the health context, communities can effectively address the factors contributing to GBV perpetration and exposure. A proactive and continuous approach to promoting mental health awareness, providing accessible services, and addressing gender-related health issues will create a safer and more supportive environment for all individuals, ultimately reducing the risk of GBV. This approach aligns with broader strategies for gender equality, emphasising collective action from all sectors of society to achieve meaningful progress.

7.3.2. Value-Based Payment Models for Gender-Equitable Care

Recommendation:	Value-Based Payment Models for Gender-Equitable Care
Objective(s):	To implement a value-based payment model within the Australian healthcare system that incentivises and rewards healthcare providers for delivering gender-equitable care, thereby reducing gender disparities in health outcomes and improving the quality of care for all patients.
Target Area:	Nationwide application across the Australian healthcare system, focusing on healthcare providers, hospitals, and clinics. The policy targets key areas such as cancer screening, chronic condition management, and patient-reported

	outcomes, with specific emphasis on improving health outcomes and experiences for women.
Rationale:	<p>The implementation of this value-based payment model addresses the current shortcomings in the Australian healthcare system by directly targeting gender disparities in health outcomes. By shifting from volume-based to value-based payment models, healthcare providers will be financially motivated to focus on the quality and equity of care they deliver, rather than simply the quantity of services provided.</p> <p>This approach recognises the multifaceted nature of women's health issues and incentivises a comprehensive approach to women's healthcare. It encourages providers to consider the full spectrum of women's health needs, from preventative care to the management of chronic conditions. The integration of gender-specific measures ensures that gender equity becomes a central focus in healthcare delivery, potentially leading to long-term improvements across the entire healthcare system.</p> <p>The policy is grounded in evidence-based practice, as value-based payment models have demonstrated effectiveness in improving care quality and efficiency in other contexts.¹⁹⁶ By incorporating gender-specific measures, this approach adapts a proven methodology to address the specific challenge of gender equity in healthcare. The combination of financial incentives and penalties creates a robust framework for continuous improvement, encouraging healthcare organisations to consistently evaluate and enhance their practices.</p>
Timeline for Implementation:	48 months

Status Quo:

Australia's healthcare system primarily relies on fee-for-service models, which do not inherently incentivise gender-equitable care. These traditional payment models reward the volume of services provided rather than the quality of care, potentially exacerbating gender disparities in health outcomes. While some initiatives focus on improving women's health, such as the National Women's Health Strategy 2020–2030 and the establishment of the National Women's Health Advisory Council, there is no comprehensive value-based payment model that specifically rewards gender-equitable care. This lack of targeted financial incentives means that healthcare providers may not be sufficiently motivated to address the unique needs of different genders, resulting in persistent disparities in health outcomes.

Recommendation Details:

The proposed policy recommends implementing a value-based payment model that incentivises gender-equitable care within the Australian healthcare system. This model would include the development of gender-specific quality measures and performance targets, focusing on areas such as screening rates for

¹⁹⁶ Commonwealth Fund. (2023, February). *Value-based care: What it is, and why it's needed*. Commonwealth Fund. <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/explainer/2023/feb/value-based-care-what-it-is-why-its-needed>

breast and cervical cancer, patient-reported outcomes for chronic conditions like osteoporosis and depression, and compliance with national guidelines for the management of women's health conditions. Realistic yet ambitious performance targets would be set based on these measures to ensure continuous improvement.

Financial incentives would be provided to healthcare organisations that demonstrate tangible progress in reducing gender disparities in health outcomes or patient experiences. These could include bonuses for meeting specific gender-equity targets or additional funding for achieving high patient satisfaction scores among women. To simplify implementation, these incentives would be integrated into existing payment structures, potentially involving adjustments to Medicare rebates or the introduction of new funding mechanisms within existing frameworks.

The policy would also include penalties for underperformance, imposing financial consequences on providers or systems that consistently underperform on gender equity measures or fail to meet established standards for gender-sensitive care. These could include reduced reimbursement rates for failing to meet minimum screening rates or the withholding of bonuses for not improving patient-reported outcomes.

7.3.3. Expand Access to Women's Health Services Through Telehealth and Mobile Health Technologies

Recommendation:	Expand Access to Women’s Health Services Through Telehealth and Mobile Health Technologies
Objective(s):	To enhance the accessibility and quality of women's health services across Australia by expanding telehealth and mobile health technologies, ensuring reimbursement parity, and establishing virtual women's health clinics, with a focus on addressing the unique challenges faced by women in rural, regional, and remote areas.
Target Area:	Nationwide implementation with a specific emphasis on rural, regional, and remote areas of Australia, aiming to improve healthcare access for women through telehealth services, mobile health apps, wearable devices, and virtual clinics.
Rationale:	<p>The implementation of this policy addresses the current limitations in access to women's health services, particularly for those in rural, regional, and remote areas. By leveraging telehealth and mobile health technologies, the policy aims to overcome geographical barriers and improve access to essential health services for women across Australia.</p> <p>This approach recognises the potential of technology to improve healthcare delivery, particularly in addressing the unique challenges faced by women in accessing timely and appropriate care. The policy's focus on reimbursement parity ensures that financial barriers to telehealth adoption are removed, encouraging healthcare providers to offer these services more widely. The investment in mobile health apps and wearable devices acknowledges the growing role of personal technology in health management. By providing</p>

	<p>women with tools to monitor their health and easily connect with healthcare providers, the policy empowers individuals to take a more active role in their health management.</p> <p>The establishment of virtual women's health clinics represents a forward-thinking approach to specialised care delivery. These clinics can provide comprehensive services that might otherwise be inaccessible to many women, particularly those in remote areas or with mobility issues.</p> <p>By improving access to care, this policy can lead to earlier interventions, better management of health conditions, and improved health outcomes for women across Australia. The use of telehealth and mobile health technologies has been proven to enhance access to care, especially in rural and underserved areas. Furthermore, this approach aligns with global trends in healthcare delivery and technological advancement.</p>
Timeline for Implementation:	18 months

Status Quo:

Australia has made significant progress in telehealth implementation, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there remains a need for greater focus on women's health services through these technologies. Currently, reimbursement parity for telehealth services is not consistently implemented, and access to mobile health technologies is limited in some areas. This situation disproportionately affects rural, regional, and remote women, who constitute one-third of Australia's female population and face unique challenges in accessing healthcare due to socioeconomic conditions and geographical isolation.

Access to women's health services is often limited, especially in rural areas, leading to delayed medical interventions, increased travel costs, and privacy concerns for sensitive health issues. While Australia has a strong healthcare system, the geographical barriers and inconsistent implementation of telehealth services for women's health create significant disparities in care accessibility and quality.

Recommendation Details:

The proposed policy aims to expand access to women's health services through telehealth and mobile health technologies. This comprehensive approach includes three key components:

Firstly, the policy advocates for reimbursement parity for telehealth services related to women's health. This involves amending existing Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) items to include telehealth services and providing clear guidelines to healthcare providers on the use and reimbursement of telehealth for women's health services. Services such as contraceptive counselling, prenatal care, and mental health screening and treatment would be reimbursed at the same rate as in-person services.

Secondly, the policy proposes investment in mobile health apps and wearable devices. This includes supporting the development and deployment of technologies that enable women to track their health status, access personalised health information and reminders, and connect with healthcare providers remotely for consultations and follow-ups. A key focus would be ensuring these technologies are user-

friendly and accessible to women of all ages and backgrounds, particularly those in rural or underserved areas, addressing digital literacy needs and ensuring cultural appropriateness.

Lastly, the policy recommends establishing virtual women's health clinics. These clinics would offer a comprehensive range of services, including gynaecological exams and consultations, fertility consultations and support, and menopause management and treatment. The virtual clinics would utilise secure video conferencing and remote monitoring technologies to provide these services, ensuring privacy and confidentiality.

7.3.4 Comprehensive Revision of Medical Curriculum, Enhanced Professional Assessments, and Mandatory Refresher Courses for Practising Professionals to Bridge Knowledge Gaps

Recommendation:	Comprehensive Revision of Medical Curriculum, Enhanced Professional Assessments, and Mandatory Refresher Courses for Practising Professionals to Bridge Knowledge Gaps
Objective(s):	To improve the quality of healthcare for women by expanding the medical education curriculum to include comprehensive, mandatory modules on female-specific health conditions and sex-specific differences in disease presentation and treatment, while also enhancing professional assessments and providing mandatory refresher courses for practising healthcare professionals.
Target Area:	Medical and allied health education institutions across Australia, as well as practising healthcare professionals nationwide, with a focus on ensuring that all healthcare providers are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to address the unique health needs of women throughout their lives.
Rationale:	Despite women having a higher life expectancy than men, they often experience poorer health outcomes due to the healthcare system's historical neglect of female-specific health needs. The current medical education framework inadequately covers critical topics related to women's health, resulting in healthcare professionals being underprepared to identify and treat conditions that predominantly or uniquely affect women. By expanding the medical curriculum to include comprehensive modules on female-specific health issues, enhancing professional assessments, and providing mandatory refresher courses for practising professionals, this policy aims to bridge these knowledge gaps and ensure that women receive high-quality, gender-sensitive care throughout their lives. This approach is essential for addressing persistent health disparities and improving overall health outcomes for Australian women.
Timeline for Implementation:	30 months

Status Quo:

Australian women, despite having a higher life expectancy than men, frequently report poorer health outcomes and spend a greater proportion of their lives in poor health. This disparity is partly due to the healthcare system's historical neglect of female-specific health needs. The existing medical education

framework inadequately covers critical topics related to women's health, such as menopause, reproductive health, and the unique ways in which chronic conditions affect women. For instance, menopause has been omitted from most undergraduate and postgraduate medical and allied health training in Australia.¹⁹⁷ This poor state of affairs is noticed internationally. For instance in the UK, a 2021 Freedom of Information request revealed that 41% of medical schools did not include mandatory education on menopause in their curricula, relying instead on students gaining this knowledge during their GP training.¹⁹⁸ Such gaps in education result in healthcare professionals being ill-prepared to identify and address many female-specific health conditions, leading to suboptimal care for women across various stages of life.

Recommendation Details:

- **Mandatory Curriculum Expansion:** The medical curriculum should be expanded to include comprehensive, mandatory modules on female-specific health conditions and sex-specific differences in disease presentation and treatment methods. This expansion should cover areas such as menopause, reproductive health, chronic pain conditions like endometriosis, and cardiovascular diseases, which often present differently in women. By ensuring that these topics are integral parts of medical education, we can better equip future healthcare professionals to recognise and treat conditions that predominantly or uniquely affect women.
- **Enhanced Professional Assessments:** Professional assessments for all medical practitioners, including GPs and specialists, should be revised to incorporate rigorous testing on women's health issues. This ensures that medical graduates and practising professionals possess the necessary knowledge and skills to provide high-quality, gender-sensitive care. For example, examination content should include case studies that test the ability to diagnose and treat conditions like polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), and to manage the complexities of female cardiovascular health, which is often underdiagnosed and undertreated.
- **Mandatory Refresher Courses for Practising Professionals to Bridge Knowledge Gaps:** Introduce mandatory, government-funded refresher courses for all practising healthcare professionals, focusing on the latest advancements in women's health. These courses should cover a range of topics, including recent research findings on female-specific diseases, the impact of hormonal changes across a woman's life course, and the psychological effects of conditions like postpartum depression and menopause. The courses should be accessible online, where possible, to ensure that all healthcare providers, regardless of location, can participate.

¹⁹⁷ Davis, Susan R, and Karen Magraith. 2023. "Advancing Menopause Care in Australia: Barriers and Opportunities." *Medical Journal of Australia* 218 (11): 500–502. <https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.51981>.

¹⁹⁸ "All-Party Parliamentary Group on Menopause Inquiry to Assess the Impacts of Menopause and the Case for Policy Reform Concluding Report 12 Th." 2022. <https://menopause-appg.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/APPG-Menopause-Inquiry-Concluding-Report-12.10.22-1.pdf>.

7.3.5 Mandate Gender-Disaggregated Data Collection

- Mandatory Data Disaggregation:** Implement a requirement for all health research and clinical trials in Australia to systematically collect and analyse data disaggregated by sex and gender. This practice is essential for identifying the specific health needs of women and understanding how diseases manifest differently in female bodies. By mandating this approach, we can ensure that the outcomes of research are more applicable to women, leading to better, more tailored treatments.

7.3.6 Research for Non-Hormonal Contraception

Recommendation:	Research for Non-Hormonal Contraception
Objective(s):	To advance the research, development, and commercialisation of safe and effective non-hormonal contraceptive options in Australia, improving reproductive health outcomes and expanding contraceptive choices for women.
Target Area:	Nationwide focus of healthcare and pharmaceutical sectors on female health, involving collaboration between academic institutions, biotechnology firms, pharmaceutical companies, and government agencies, with targeted research funding and public awareness campaigns to promote non-hormonal contraception alternatives.
Rationale:	This policy recommendation presents an opportunity to address gaps in current contraceptive options and advance reproductive health research in Australia. By allocating resources, fostering innovation, and prioritising non-hormonal contraception research, Australia could make significant advancements in this field. The proposed initiatives align with objectives of improving public health, promoting scientific research, and potentially stimulating economic growth in the biotechnology sector.
Timeline for Implementation:	60 months

Status Quo:

The invention of hormonal contraception has created great strides in sexual freedom and equality. However, there is much progress yet to be made. Currently, hormonal contraception is prescribed to women without much consideration. From YWA’s surveys and interviews, it is clear that hormonal contraception, mainly the pill, is prescribed as the main way to address irregular, heavy or painful periods, acne and PMS symptoms.

Although the pill is useful for addressing these health problems, it is prescribed to women from a young age, often without adequately informing them of the many and significant health risks. Hormonal contraception is linked to a variety of serious health conditions. Research shows an increased risk of venous thromboembolism (VTE), particularly with estrogen-containing pills, causing significant concerns

about blood clotting¹⁹⁹. Cardiovascular risks are also heightened, with long-term pill use being associated with a greater likelihood of stroke, heart attacks, and hypertension. This risk is exacerbated in women with pre-existing conditions like high blood pressure, and those who engage in high risk activities like smoking²⁰⁰.

There are also harmful mental health effects associated with taking the pill. A 2023 study found that women using combined contraceptive pills had a 73% higher risk of developing depression, particularly during the first two years of use²⁰¹. The mechanism by which hormonal contraceptives affect mood is not entirely understood, but it is believed that the synthetic hormones in these contraceptives can alter the balance of neurotransmitters in the brain, such as serotonin and dopamine, which are crucial for regulating mood and influence personality.

Additionally, while the pill has been found to reduce the risk of ovarian and endometrial cancers, it has been correlated with an increased risk of breast cancer²⁰². Other less significant but still present side effects include mood swings, reduced libido, and gastrointestinal issues.

Recommendation Details:

This policy recommendation addresses the need for advancing research and development in non-hormonal birth control methods in Australia, with a focus on non-hormonal alternatives. The proposed policy aims to address current gaps in reproductive health options through increased funding, prioritised research, and public-private collaboration.

Funding Allocation

It is recommended that specific funding allocations be established within the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) dedicated to non-hormonal contraceptive research. A suggested allocation of \$50 million AUD over five years would significantly boost this area of research. The funding should be distributed through a tiered grant system:

1. Early-stage research grants: Up to \$500,000 AUD
2. Clinical trial grants: Up to \$2 million AUD
3. Commercialisation grants: Up to \$5 million AUD

This tiered system aims to support projects from inception to market-ready products, creating a pipeline of new contraceptive options.

¹⁹⁹ Sharmila Brabakaran, Sajesh K Veetil, Jennifer E Kaiser, Vrosha Rau, Rujira Wattanayingcharoenchai, Marikannan Maharajan, Putsarat Insin, et al. 2022. "Association of Hormonal Contraceptive Use with Adverse Health Outcomes." *JAMA Network Open* 5 (1): e2143730–30. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.43730>.

²⁰⁰ Reddy V, Wurtz M, Patel SH, McCarthy M, Raval AP. *Oral contraceptives and stroke: Foes or friends*. *Front Neuroendocrinol*. 2022 Oct;67:101016. doi:10.1016/j.yfrne.2022.101016.

²⁰¹ T. Johansson, S. Vinther Larsen, M. Bui, W. E. Ek, T. Karlsson, Å. Johansson. **Population-based cohort study of oral contraceptive use and risk of depression**. *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences*, 2023; 32 DOI: [10.1017/S2045796023000525](https://doi.org/10.1017/S2045796023000525)

²⁰² Satish S, Moor

e JF, Littlefield JM, Bishop IJ, Rojas KE. *Re-Evaluating the Association Between Hormonal Contraception and Breast Cancer Risk*. *Breast Cancer (Dove Med Press)*. 2023 Mar 22;15:227-235. doi:10.2147/BCTT.S390664.

Fast-Track Review Process

To accelerate development, a fast-track review process should be implemented for promising projects. This process should maintain scientific rigour while reducing administrative delays.

Public-Private Collaboration

The policy should include measures to incentivise pharmaceutical companies and biotechnology firms to invest in non-hormonal contraceptive research. Fostering partnerships between academia, industry, and government agencies would leverage diverse expertise and resources.

Research Prioritisation

It is recommended that "Development of Safe and Non-Hormonal Contraception" be added to the key priorities list for the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. This would elevate the status of non-hormonal contraception research and potentially attract more resources and talent to the field.

Public Awareness and Education

A national awareness campaign should be launched to educate the public about diverse contraceptive options. Additionally, educational materials should be developed for healthcare providers to ensure they are informed about the latest research and options in non-hormonal contraception.

Research Focus Areas

The policy should prioritise research in the following areas:

1. Improved barrier methods (e.g., advanced condom materials, cervical caps)
2. Spermicidal agents with reduced side effects
3. Immunocontraception
4. Male contraceptive options
5. Applications of nanotechnology for targeted contraceptive delivery systems

Interdisciplinary Approach

The policy should encourage interdisciplinary research, combining reproductive biology with fields such as materials science and pharmacology. This approach could lead to innovative contraceptive technologies.

International Collaboration

Collaboration with international research institutions and organisations should be fostered. Participation in global forums and conferences would allow Australian researchers to share knowledge and attract international expertise.

Anticipated Outcomes

1. Increased number of non-hormonal contraceptive options available within a decade
2. Improved health outcomes for women who experience adverse effects from hormonal contraceptives
3. Enhanced reproductive choice for Australians
4. Potential economic benefits through the creation of new industries and job opportunities in Australia
5. Establishment of Australia as a leader in contraceptive research and development



CAREER

8.1 The Situation

What does existing research say about young people's, particularly young women's experiences?

The Australian labour market is a paradox for women: strong educational gains coexist with persistent employment disparities, disproportionate undertaking of care work, workplace harassment with limited resolution, and structural impediments to career advancement.

8.1.1 Educational Attainment & Earnings Disparity

As of 2022, 93% of women aged 20-24 attained Year 12 or Certificate III level or above, compared to 87% of men.²⁰³ Among Australians aged 25-34, 52% of women held a bachelor's degree or higher in 2023, compared to 38.4% of men.²⁰⁴ Despite these higher educational achievements, the gender pay gap materialises upon entry into the workforce. For bachelor's degree graduates, the gender pay gap has widened. In 2022, male graduates earned on average \$5,700 more per year than female graduates, up from \$2,400 in 2019.²⁰⁵ Immediately after graduation, the median full-time starting salary for men was \$69,400, while for women it was \$67,400.²⁰⁶ Choice of study influences these pay disparities. Women are underrepresented in STEM fields, which often lead to higher-paying careers. However, even when women enter STEM fields, disparities exist. For instance, in engineering, male graduates earn on average \$6,000 more per year than female graduates three years after graduation.²⁰⁷ Even in nursing, where 88% of the workforce is women²⁰⁸, men earn significantly more, with a salary gap of \$6,300 (7.6%) three years after graduating.²⁰⁹

8.1.2 Gender Segregation in Caring Professions and STEM Fields

Caring professions remain heavily gender-segregated, with women comprising 77% of the workforce in the health care and social assistance sector.²¹⁰ This sector, which includes child care, aged care, and disability care, consistently affords lower remuneration than other industries. For instance, the median weekly earnings in health care and social assistance stand at \$1,248, below the all-industry median of

²⁰³ "Education and Work, Australia, May 2023." 2023. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2023. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/education-and-work-australia/latest-release>.

²⁰⁴ Ibid

²⁰⁵ Precel, Nicole. 2022. "Gender Pay Gap More than Doubles among University Graduates." The Age. The Age. October 11, 2022. <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/gender-pay-gap-more-than-doubles-among-university-graduates-20221011-p5bou2.html>.

²⁰⁶ "2022 Graduate Outcomes Survey Short-Term Graduate Short-Term Graduate Outcomes in Australia Outcomes in Australia." 2023. https://www.qilt.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2022-gos-national-report.pdf?sfvrsn=c5d342c8_2.

²⁰⁷ Ibid

²⁰⁸ "Health Workforce." 2024. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. July 2, 2024. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/workforce/health-workforce>.

²⁰⁹ Precel, Nicole. 2022. "Gender Pay Gap More than Doubles among University Graduates." The Age. The Age. October 11, 2022. <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/gender-pay-gap-more-than-doubles-among-university-graduates-20221011-p5bou2.html>.

²¹⁰ "Health Care and Social Assistance." 2024. Jobs and Skills Australia. July 2, 2024. <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/labour-market-insights/industries/health-care-and-social-assistance>.

\$1,300.²¹¹ In contrast, Australian women remain underrepresented in STEM fields which usually have higher salaries. The average base salary for scientists in Australia is \$115,000, with the average total package being \$131,488;²¹² mechanical engineers can expect salaries ranging from \$75,000 to \$150,000;²¹³ data scientists earn between \$105,000 and \$125,000 annually.²¹⁴ Only 27% of Australia's 2021 STEM workforce was women.²¹⁵ This underrepresentation is pronounced in certain STEM areas: 15% of STEM-qualified jobs are held by women; 23% of senior management and 8% of CEOs in STEM-qualified industries are women.²¹⁶ The gender pay gap in STEM industries in 2023 stood at 16%, with women earning an average of \$26,420 less than men.²¹⁷

8.1.3 Reliance on Part-time Employment

Women constitute 39% of the full-time workforce and 68% of the part-time workforce.²¹⁸ This proportion has remained stable over the past decade, hindering women's economic independence and agency; in August 2012, women were 35% of full-time workers and 71% of part-time workers.²¹⁹ The higher proportion of women in part-time roles is attributed to caregiving responsibilities and work-life balance "preferences." Here, an assumption of agency is flawed; women's "choices" are mediated by societal norms, economic structures, and interpersonal power dynamics in relationships.²²⁰ These patterns have implications for women's long-term economic security and career progression. The gender pay gap, while narrowing, persists partly due to these differences in working patterns.²²¹ In the legal profession, for example, women now constitute 61.4% of law graduates.²²² Yet, women account for 33% of equity partners in law firms.²²³ Moreover, women with over 11 years of experience in the legal industry earn, on average, 25% less than their male counterparts at the same career stage.²²⁴

²¹¹ Ibid

²¹² "Professional Scientists Employment Report out Now!" 2020. Professionalsaustralia.org.au. 2020.

https://scientists.professionalsaustralia.org.au/Scientists/News/Professional_Scientists_Employment_and_Remuneration_Survey_Report_Out_Now.aspx.

²¹³ SEEK Limited. 2024. "Top 10 Careers in STEM (with Salaries)." SEEK. SEEK Limited. May 20, 2024. <https://www.seek.com.au/career-advice/article/top-10-careers-in-stem-with-salaries>.

²¹⁴ SEEK Limited. 2024. "A Comprehensive Guide to Careers with STEM." SEEK. SEEK Limited. May 20, 2024. <https://www.seek.com.au/career-advice/article/a-comprehensive-guide-to-careers-with-stem>.

²¹⁵ "STEM Equity Monitor Data Report 2024." Accessed July 28, 2024. <https://www.industry.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-07/2024%20Highlights%20report%20PDF%20FINAL.pdf>.

²¹⁶ "#IWD2024: How Australia Can Improve Its STEM Workforce Diversity." 2024. Aicd.com.au. 2024. <https://www.aicd.com.au/board-of-directors/diversity/women/IWD2024-how-australia-can-improve-its-stem-workforce-diversity.html>.

²¹⁷ "Gender Pay Gaps in STEM and Other Industries." Industry.gov.au. July 26, 2024. <https://www.industry.gov.au/publications/stem-equity-monitor/workforce-data/gender-pay-gaps-stem-and-other-industries>.

²¹⁸ "Labour Force, Australia, September 2022." 2022. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Australian Bureau of Statistics. October 20, 2022. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/sep-2022>.

²¹⁹ "Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, August 2022." 2022. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Australian Bureau of Statistics. September 21, 2022. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed/aug-2022>.

²²⁰ Westmore, Ben. n.d. "Fully Realising the Economic Potential of Women in Australia." https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/04/fully-realising-the-economic-potential-of-women-in-australia_34b0e802/3470e5d8-en.pdf.

²²¹ "Equal Pay Day 2024 | WGEA." 2024. Wgea.gov.au. July 2024. <https://www.wgea.gov.au/pay-and-gender/equal-pay-day-2024>.

²²² "Children by Option - Women Constitute 5000-Mile of Law School." 2024. Legaladvice.com.au. 2024. <https://www.legaladvice.com.au/legal-advice/children-by-option>.

²²³ "Measure for Measure: Gender Equality in Australia - per Capita." 2023. Per Capita. July 10, 2023. https://percapita.org.au/our_work/measure-for-measure-gender-equality-in-australia/.

²²⁴ Shanahan, Maxim. 2024. "Law Firm Graduate Pay Tops \$110k, but Pay Gap Remains Stubborn." Australian Financial Review. Australian Financial Review. May 2, 2024. <https://www.afr.com/companies/professional-services/legal-grad-pay-tops-110k-but-pay-gap-still-stubborn-20240430-p5fnvd>.

8.1.4 Impact of Care-taking Responsibilities; Constrained “Choices”

Women with children under 5 years old have a part-time employment rate of 61%, compared to 8.4% for fathers with young children.²²⁵ This ‘motherhood penalty’ contributes to lower lifetime earnings and super accumulation, and limited career ascension for many women. Bahar et. al. (2022) estimated a 55% decline in female earnings following the arrival of children that is the combined result of a sharp drop in hours worked and employment rate. At the same time, that study showed little discernible impact on the earnings of men once they became fathers.²²⁶ Together, these illustrate the earlier point of an agential assumption being flawed. Structural impediments persist, creating significant disadvantages whether women stay at home or pursue work. When returning to work, a 2024 study found that 91.8% of respondents experienced discrimination during their return-to-work phase after having a child, while 22.4% reported losing their jobs; 95% of these respondents were women.²²⁷

8.1.5 Prevalence of Workplace Harassment & Limited Redress

Workplaces in Australia do not provide a safe environment for women. 2022 research aimed to investigate the prevalence, nature and reporting of sexual harassment in Australian workplaces.²²⁸ It found:

- Approximately 1 in 5 (19%) people experienced sexual harassment at work in the 12 months prior to the survey.
- Nearly 1 in 3 (33%) people had experienced sexual harassment at work in the 5 years preceding the survey (41% of women and 26% of men).²²⁹
- Additionally, 26% of women who recently experienced sexual harassment experienced it at work.²³⁰
- The majority (77%) of workplace sexual harassment was perpetrated by men: 91% of women and 55% of men were harassed by men; 9% of women and 44% of men were harassed by women.²³¹
- For both women and men, the perpetrator was most likely to be a co-worker at the same level (23% and 27% respectively), and sexually suggestive comments or jokes were the most common form of harassment – 40% of women and 14% of men experienced these behaviours in the 5 years preceding the survey.²³²

²²⁵ “Main Features - Economic Security.” 2017. Abs.gov.au. c=AU; o=Commonwealth of Australia; ou=Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2017. <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4125.0~Sep%202017~Main%20Features~Economic%20Security~4>.

²²⁶ Westmore, Ben. n.d. “Fully Realising the Economic Potential of Women in Australia.” https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/04/fully-realising-the-economic-potential-of-women-in-australia_34b0e802/3470e5d8-en.pdf.

²²⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063640436778>. 2017. “Mothers Face Workplace Discrimination.” Hummingbird Careers. 2017. <https://hummingbirdcareers.com.au/2024/03/26/mothers-face-workplace-discrimination/>.

²²⁸ “Time for Respect: Fifth National Survey on Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces.” 2022. Humanrights.gov.au. November 30, 2022. <https://humanrights.gov.au/time-for-respect-2022>.

²²⁹ Ibid

²³⁰ “Status of Women Report Card 2024 | Working for Women.” 2024. Genderequality.gov.au. March 7, 2024. <https://genderequality.gov.au/status-women-report-cards/2024-report-card>.

²³¹ “Sexual Violence.” 2024. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. July 19, 2024. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/types-of-violence/sexual-violence#data>.

²³² Ibid

- Despite the prevalence, only 18% of people made a formal report or complaint about sexual harassment at work.²³³
- Of people who made a formal report or complaint, 40% said that no changes were made at their workplace, a concerning indication of the lack of effective institutional response to harassment.²³⁴
- A lack of change was more common for complaints lodged by women (45%), than by men (30%), indicating systemically ingrained impediments to women’s careers.²³⁵

Further, one in seven Australian adults admit to engaging in workplace technology-facilitated sexual harassment.²³⁶ Men were more than three times as likely as women to be perpetrators of workplace technology-facilitated sexual harassment.²³⁷

8.1.6 Structural Impediments to Career Advancement

Women are overrepresented in lower-paid, caregiving roles and underrepresented in higher-paying STEM fields. Even if joining STEM professions, pay and leadership disparities persist. Part-time employment due to caregiving responsibilities hampers women’s career progression and long-term economic security. Despite a significant proportion of women returning to work after childbirth, they encounter discrimination and job loss. Workplace harassment remains prevalent, with insufficient institutional redress to complaints. These systemic barriers undermine women’s economic security and professional advancement. Given that career and economic stability are foundational to self-esteem, personal fulfilment, health, and safety, these barriers have dangerous flow-on effects on every aspect of women’s lives. Additionally, feminist discourse and economic analysis reveals that despite progressive workplace policies over the last few decades, middle-income women have benefitted less so, in what could be described as gendered stagnation.²³⁸

8.2 Primary Research

What does YWA research, including our survey, interviews, literature reviews, and expert consultations, say about young people’s, particularly young women’s experience?

²³³ Ibid

²³⁴ “Prevalence of Lifetime Sexual Harassment (Not Limited to the Workplace).” n.d. https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/infographics_1-9_24nov2022-2_1_0.pdf.

²³⁵ “Time for Respect: Fifth National Survey on Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces 2022.”

https://www.respectatwork.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-11/2022.11.18_Time%20for%20Respect%202022%20%28Full%20Report%29.pdf.

²³⁶ “Technology-Facilitated Sexual Harassment in the Workplace: Perpetration, Responses and Prevention - ANROWS - Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety.” 2024. ANROWS - Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety. May 27, 2024. <https://www.anrows.org.au/project/technology-facilitated-sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace-perpetration-responses-and-prevention/>.

²³⁷ McGregor, Viv. 2024. “One in Seven Australian Adults Report Engaging in Workplace Technology-Facilitated Sexual Harassment New Study Finds - ANROWS - Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety.” ANROWS - Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety. April 29, 2024. <https://www.anrows.org.au/media-releases/one-in-seven-australian-adults-report-engaging-in-workplace-technology-facilitated-sexual-harassment-new-study-finds/>.

²³⁸ Gender in employment policies and programmes: What works for women? Employment Working Paper No. 235. Employment Policy Department, International Labour Office.

8.2.1 Survey Findings

YWA survey reveals that women experience higher rates of workplace sexual harassment.. They also strongly reject the motherhood pay gap, highlighting increased awareness and intolerance of gendered economic disparities.

The survey also demonstrates significant differences in perceptions of leadership. Men are more likely to believe that they and other men are better leaders than women, reflecting deep-seated gender biases. Both genders report confusion about their life direction, although this was more pronounced among women.

Despite these challenges, women display greater confidence in their ability to make significant professional contributions. Such resilience among adversity suggests the potential success of women’s empowerment messaging, even if tangible barriers remain.

Overall, gender injustice persists in the workplace, from perceptions through to experiences and outcomes.

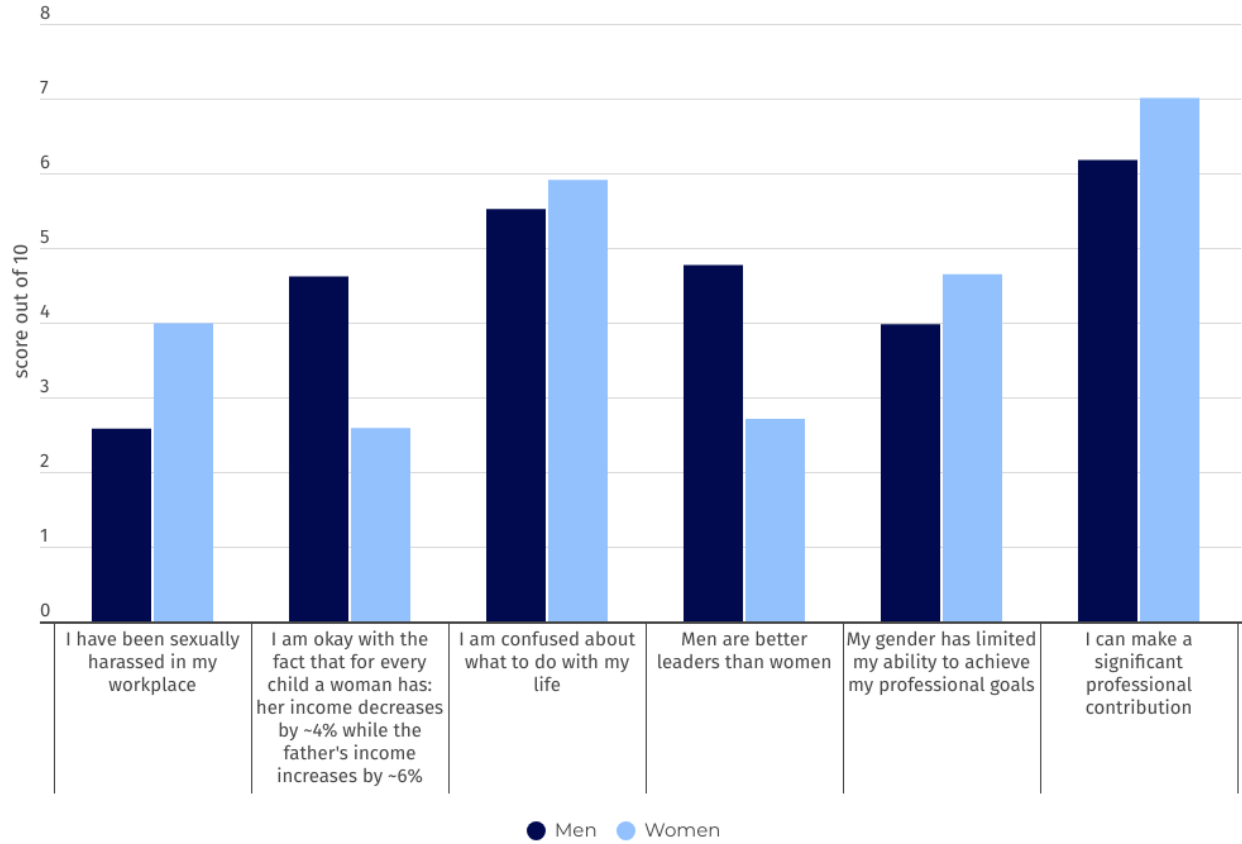
Table 17: Career by Gender

Career by Gender Variable	Gender Identity	
	Men	Women
I have been sexually harassed in my workplace	2.58 (1.00)	3.99 (4.00)
I am okay with the fact that for every child a woman has: her income decreases by ~4% while the father's income increases by ~6%	4.62 (5.00)	2.59 (2.00)
I feel confused about what to do with my life	5.52 (6.00)	5.91 (6.00)
Men are better leaders than women	4.77 (5.00)	2.71 (2.00)
I believe my gender has limited my ability to achieve my professional goals	3.98 (4.00)	4.65 (5.00)

I believe I can make a significant professional contribution	6.18 (7.00)	7.01 (7.00)
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8.2.2 Interview Insights

Figure 28: Career by Gender



In **interviews**, young women noted six thematic challenges, with respect to their careers. These themes are organised by problems most mentioned, representative quotes, words most mentioned, and solutions most mentioned.

8.2.2.1 Theme 1: Career Challenges for Young Australian Women

Young Australian women struggle with pervasive gender discrimination, limited leadership opportunities, particularly in male-dominated fields, and constant pressure to prove themselves. Balancing career aspirations with family responsibilities adds a layer of complexity to their professional journey. The lack of tailored career guidance and support systems further exacerbates these challenges. To address this, better enforcement of anti-discrimination policies, mentorship programs, and flexible work arrangements

are proposed. These measures aim to empower women and alleviate the gendered disadvantages they face in their careers.

Problems most mentioned:

1. Gender discrimination: Pervasive bias in hiring, promotion, and daily interactions
2. Limited leadership opportunities: Underrepresentation in senior roles and decision-making positions
3. Work-life balance struggles: Difficulty managing career aspirations with family responsibilities
4. Underrepresentation in certain fields: Particularly in STEM and other male-dominated industries
5. Lack of career guidance: Insufficient tailored advice for navigating career paths
6. Societal pressures: Expectations to conform to traditional gender roles while pursuing a career

Representative quotes:

1. “Rural young people hardly have any career opportunities and our sense of what is possible is so limited, we just don’t know. I think sometimes that isn’t talked about very much.”
2. “struggling with a work-life balance and feeling this internal perhaps or even external pressure to go above and beyond and achieve highly in all facets.”
3. “I think that there should be an introduction of more lenient leave policies and hiring [for women].”
4. “So I know I’d like to see the government promote or subsidise [work life balance] or encourage it in some way.”
5. “Myself and my female co-workers do see far more clients than our male counterparts.” (she was saying that they do more of the caretaking work than men, even in professional settings).
6. “I would also wish that the Australian government would sort of fund programs like more for women, especially for young women as well, to step into like leadership positions.”
7. “At work, I think I’m constantly aware of acting a certain way, so I’m not seen as dressing too revealing or coming off too strongly on other people.”
8. “That joke was heard by everybody in that room, all the women in that room, about how it was an inconvenience for him, for one of his employees to go on maternity leave.”
9. “I think that a commission should be set up to investigate the current corporate structures that we see throughout society and how women are being treated in terms of general treatment.”

Words most mentioned:

Guidance
Formal and informal mentoring
Anti-discrimination policies
Cultural shifts
Pervasive bias
Promotions
Access to opportunities
Monitoring of existing laws

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Cultural shifts: Promoting gender equality in workplaces and society at large
2. Better enforcement of anti-discrimination policies: Stricter implementation and monitoring of existing laws
3. Mentorship programs: Establishing formal and informal mentoring networks for young women
4. Flexible work arrangements: Implementing policies that encourage better work-life balance
5. Enhanced support services: Providing resources for career development, mental health, and family support
6. Tailored career guidance: Offering personalised advice and support throughout career stages

8.2.2.2 Theme 2: Support Systems and Mentorship

Problems most mentioned:

1. Lack of tailored career guidance: Insufficient personalised advice for specific career paths and industries
2. Insufficient diversity in mentorship programs: Limited representation of diverse backgrounds and experiences among mentors
3. Limited access to women mentors in certain fields: Scarcity of female role models in male-dominated industries
4. Inadequate support for career development: Lack of comprehensive programs addressing various career stages
5. Lack of networking opportunities: Insufficient platforms for young women to build professional connections
6. Insufficient skill development programs: Limited access to training that enhances professional competencies

Representative quotes:

1. “I was involved quite a bit with career trackers, a career program.”
2. “So we did have help in terms of career, but nothing holistic, nothing about life purpose.”
3. “Only because I had the networks and I had certain skill sets to be able to find different job opportunities and things like that.”

Words most mentioned:

Knowledge
Training
Tailored guidance
Industry specifics
Career trackers
Mentoring networks
Practical advice

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Implement comprehensive mentoring programs: Establish structured mentorship initiatives across various industries
2. Increase diversity in career support programs: Ensure representation of mentors from diverse backgrounds and experiences
3. Provide tailored career guidance: Offer personalised advice based on individual career goals and industry specifics
4. Create networking opportunities: Organise events and platforms for young women to build professional connections
5. Develop skill-building initiatives: Offer training programs to enhance professional competencies
6. Establish programs within male-dominated majors: Create support systems specifically for women in STEM and other male-dominated fields

Mentoring programs, especially those involving women in similar fields, are valuable for building confidence and providing practical advice. However, there must be more tailored career guidance and increased diversity in existing programs. Networking opportunities and skill development initiatives are also seen as essential for career advancement. Solutions include implementing comprehensive mentoring

programs with diverse representation, providing tailored career guidance, and creating more networking opportunities.

8.2.2.3 Theme 3: Education and Early Career Programs

Problems most mentioned:

1. Lack of early career guidance: Insufficient information and support for career path exploration in schools
2. Limited exposure to diverse career options: Narrow focus on traditional career paths, overlooking emerging fields
3. Insufficient programs in male-dominated fields: Lack of initiatives to encourage women's participation in STEM and other male-dominated areas
4. Inadequate education on social issues and life skills: Limited curriculum coverage of important societal topics and practical life skills
5. Lack of support in transitioning from education to career: Gap between academic knowledge and practical workplace skills
6. Limited understanding of career paths in certain fields: Insufficient information about potential career trajectories in various industries

Representative quotes:

1. “[Programs at school] really motivated a lot of my education, my career aspirations.”
2. “I wasn't given anything, like, no one said, hey, you should think about doing finance. Actually, no one said that [to] me.”
3. “Honestly, I don't really know the steps involved in making a business.”
4. “It seems like we were seeing the utopia of STEM, you know, talking to the few women who actually made it, seeing this inaccurate sample size.”
5. “I think that would be the easiest thing someone can do, which is to have a quota for hiring a certain number of women.”

Words most mentioned:

Ambition
Financial literacy
STEM programs
Quotas
Guidance
Practical knowledge
Mentoring networks
Career planning

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Implement targeted STEM programs for young women: Create initiatives to encourage and support women's participation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
2. Incorporate social issues and life skills into curriculum: Integrate topics such as gender equality, racial justice, and financial literacy into school programs
3. Provide clear career guidance from early education: Offer comprehensive career exploration and planning support from primary school onwards
4. Create programs to support women in male-dominated majors: Establish mentorship and support networks for women in fields where they are underrepresented
5. Offer more internship and work experience opportunities: Facilitate practical exposure to various career fields through partnerships with industries
6. Develop programs to ease the transition from education to career: Create initiatives that bridge the gap between academic learning and workplace requirements

Education and early career programs can shape the career aspirations of young Australian women. School programs can have a lasting impact on career choices. Many young women report a lack of guidance in certain career paths, highlighting the importance of early exposure to diverse career options. There is a demand for programs addressing social issues and life skills, which are overlooked in traditional curricula. Solutions could include implementing targeted STEM programs for young women, incorporating social issues and life skills into the curriculum, providing career guidance from early education, and creating programs to support women in male-dominated subjects.

8.2.2.4 Theme 4: Workplace Discrimination and Sexism

Problems most mentioned:

1. Verbal abuse and inappropriate comments: Women experiencing derogatory remarks and jokes in the workplace
2. Power imbalances: Unequal treatment and opportunities based on gender
3. Biased perceptions of women's capabilities: Underestimation of skills and potential due to gender stereotypes
4. Lack of support from HR departments: Insufficient action taken against discrimination and harassment
5. Maternity leave seen as an inconvenience: Negative attitudes towards women taking maternity leave
6. Need to overcompensate and prove worth: Women feeling pressured to work harder to gain respect and recognition

Representative quotes:

1. “At work as a woman, I’m constantly aware of acting a certain way, so I’m not seen as dressing too revealing or coming off too strongly on other people, so I’m palatable and likeable. All the time through my mind.”
2. “The joke was heard by everybody in that room, all the women in the room, about how it was an inconvenience for the boss for one of his employees to go on maternity leave.”
3. “I didn't feel like I was prepared. And a lot of it just came down to knowing, not knowing my worth at the time and not having support in navigating situations where there were power imbalances, especially involving gender and finances.”
4. “There's definitely not a lot [of consent education] in the workplaces”
5. “I believe that the government should increase visibility by way of increased campaigns, ads, things like that to improve public awareness and understanding of the condition.”

Words most mentioned:

Biased perceptions^{HR}
 Workplace sexism
 Hyperawareness
 Corporate structures
 Equal parental leave policies
 Systemic issues
 Anti-discrimination policies

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Implement better anti-discrimination policies: Develop and enforce stricter guidelines against workplace discrimination
2. Increase awareness through campaigns and ads: Launch public education initiatives about workplace sexism and its impacts
3. Establish a commission to investigate corporate structures: Create an independent body to examine and address systemic issues
4. Mandate consent and respectful relationship seminars: Implement compulsory training on appropriate workplace behaviour
5. Encourage men to take parental leave: Promote equal parental leave policies to reduce gender-based career impacts
6. Increase mental health support for all employees: Provide resources to address stress and anxiety caused by workplace issues

Young Australian women face verbal abuse, inappropriate comments, and are undermined in the workplace. Power imbalances and biased perceptions regarding their capabilities and professionalism are common. Women feel the need to overcompensate and work harder to prove their worth, while men are automatically respected. Maternity leave is seen as an inconvenience by employers, hindering women's professional advancement. The lack of support from HR departments and insufficient action against subtle discrimination exacerbates these problems. Proposed solutions include implementing stronger anti-discrimination policies, launching awareness campaigns, establishing a commission to investigate corporate structures, mandating consent and respectful relationship seminars, and incentivising men to take parental leave.

8.2.2.5 Theme 5: Job Stability and Financial Stress

Problems most mentioned:

1. Difficulty in finding stable, well-paying jobs: Limited availability of secure, high-quality positions
2. High competition in job markets: Oversaturation of candidates, especially in popular industries
3. Mental health impacts of job instability: Anxiety and stress related to career uncertainty
4. Financial stress and need for side income: Insufficient earnings from primary jobs leading to additional work
5. Job insecurity after maternity leave: Concerns about career continuity after having children
6. Impact of COVID-19 on job prospects: Reduced opportunities and increased competition due to the pandemic

Representative quotes:

1. "I've changed roles and careers throughout the last 12 months. And I think just accessing mental health for all of these intersectionalities of my life has been hard."

2. “If I become a parent and I go on maternity leave and then I want to return part-time, am I going to get another contract?”
3. “There's only so many firms in the CBD, and there are so many students wanting the same position.”
4. “ I will get a well-paying job by the end of the degree, because you're pretty much guaranteed to [after you] become an intern once you, like, pass all the hurdles.”
5. “I'm anxious about everything: my life, my career, my personal life.”

Words most mentioned:

Oversaturation of candidates
 Education --> work transition programs
 Salary transparency
 Job instability
Mental health support
 Female mentors
 Post-pregnancy job security
 Support networks

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Increase access to mental health services: Provide more affordable and accessible mental health support
2. Provide mentoring programs: Establish career guidance and support networks for young professionals
3. Offer financial support for sectors affected by COVID-19: Implement targeted assistance to industries hit hardest by the pandemic
4. Implement policies to ensure job security after maternity leave: Develop regulations protecting women's careers post-childbirth
5. Publish industry median salaries for transparency: Make salary information readily available to aid in negotiations
6. Provide more support for young graduates entering the job market: Create programs to ease the transition from education to employment

Young women struggle to secure well-paying, stable employment. They experience job loss, temporary contracts, and high competition in the job market. This instability leads to frequent job changes which impacts mental health and causes anxiety about the future. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues, making it harder to find secure positions. Women express particular concern about job security when returning to work part-time or finding themselves in temporary contracts after maternity leave.

Financial stress often necessitates taking on side jobs or gig work, further complicating work-life balance. Proposed solutions include increasing access to mental health services, providing mentoring programs, offering financial support for sectors affected by COVID-19, implementing policies to ensure job security after maternity leave, and publishing industry median salaries for transparency.

8.2.2.6 Theme 6: Gender Bias in Professional Settings

Problems most mentioned:

1. Unequal access to opportunities: Women facing barriers in career advancement and job opportunities
2. Higher standards for women's appearance and behaviour: Expectations for women to present themselves differently than men
3. Underestimation of women's abilities: Assumptions about competence based on gender
4. Lack of women in leadership roles: Underrepresentation in high-level positions across industries
5. "Boys club" mentality in certain industries: Exclusive networks and cultures that favour men
6. Self-doubt and imposter syndrome among women: Internalised biases affecting confidence and ambition

Representative quotes:

1. "In any professional environment as a woman, I feel like I need to have extra credentials to sometimes be taken seriously..."
2. "We have to be like, no, like, we can't put ourselves down or doubt ourselves."
3. "When the results [for school leadership] came out, it turned out that only boys had been elected."
4. "Men invented the 40-hour work week at a time when women were for the most part expected to stay home and perform all those household duties."

Words most mentioned:

Unconscious bias
"Boys club"
Fair compensation
Gender-neutral leadership
Work-life balance
Undervalued & worked
Imposter syndrome

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Increase representation of women in leadership: Actively promote and support women in senior positions
2. Implement equal pay policies: Ensure fair compensation regardless of gender
3. Create more inclusive workplace cultures: Foster environments that value diversity and challenge biases
4. Provide training on unconscious bias: Educate employees and managers about recognising and addressing biases
5. Establish mentorship programs for women: Create support networks specifically for women's career development
6. Promote gender-neutral leadership positions: Ensure equal opportunities for advancement regardless of gender

Despite the presence of women in various fields, they often face unequal access to opportunities, higher standards of presentation, and expectations to conform to traditional gender norms. Women report needing to put in extra effort to be taken seriously and are hyperconscious of the way they dress and behave in professional settings. Leadership roles remain predominantly male, creating environments ripe with power imbalances and discrimination. The “boys club” mentality in many industries contributes to women feeling undervalued and overlooked for promotions. Self-doubt and imposter syndrome are common experiences which stem from internalised bias. To rectify this, participants suggest training on unconscious bias, mentorship programs for women, and the promotion of gender-neutral leadership positions.

8.2.3 Literature Review

Women's career ambitions, earnings, and self-agency are significantly influenced by their romantic relationships or desire to form one. Research has demonstrated that women's relationship status influences their work-related decision-making and behaviours, as they balance these against societal norms and gendered expectations for professional achievement. In a 2017 study, the researchers conducted a field experiment with newly admitted MBA students at US institutions to understand how social perceptions affect women's career decisions.²³⁹ The experiment revealed stark differences in behaviour based on the perceived public visibility of their responses. Single women who were told their survey answers might be shared with their peers reported a desired annual salary of \$112,000, significantly lower than the \$131,000 reported by those who believed their answers would remain private. Additionally, these women expressed a preference for less travel (6.6 days per month vs. 13.5 days) and fewer working hours (48.3 hours per week vs. 52.2 hours). Further, in mixed-gender groups with single men, women were more likely to choose jobs with lower salaries and fewer hours. However, when placed in all-female groups, they preferred higher-paying roles with more demanding responsibilities, including jobs with faster promotion schedules and more travel. This pattern indicates that the presence of potential male partners influences single women to alter their career aspirations to appear more ‘desirable.’

²³⁹ Bursztyn, L., Fujiwara, T., & Pallais, A. (2017). 'Acting Wife': Marriage market incentives and labour market investments. *American Economic Review*, 107(11), 3288–3319. <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20170029>

Additionally, a 2020 study offered insight into the consequences of career success on marital stability.²⁴⁰ Analysing 30 years of data, they found that women who were promoted to high-status positions, such as mayors or parliamentarians, were twice as likely to experience divorce compared to those who were not promoted.

Thus, women’s self-modification, driven by the desire to maintain or attain a romantic relationship, results in lower earnings, diminished career progression, and reduced personal agency. Current career development programmes in Australia often overlook the impact that relationship dynamics have on women's professional lives, focusing primarily on skills acquisition and career planning without addressing underlying social or romantic pressures that constrain career decisions.

8.3 Policy Recommendations

Based on these learnings from primary research, YWA recommends the following **targeted policy recommendations** to address the identified issues.

8.3.1 Development of an Australian Economic Opportunities Platform (EOP) for Young Women

Recommendation:	Development of an Australian Economic Opportunities Platform (EOP) for Young Women
Objective(s):	To enhance economic empowerment and employment opportunities for young women across Australia by creating a dynamic Economic Opportunities Platform (EOP) that aligns skill development with real-time market demands, particularly in male-dominated industries.
Target Area:	Nationwide implementation with a focus on male-dominated industries such as construction, mining, and utilities, and prioritising outreach to young women, particularly those from disadvantaged or rural backgrounds, to bridge gender disparities in the workforce.
Rationale:	The EOP is expected to significantly improve employment opportunities for young women in Australia by providing a structured pathway from skill development to employment. By incentivising participation in male-dominated industries, the platform will help address skill shortages and contribute to the nation's economic growth. This initiative aligns with broader efforts to close the gender pay gap, reduce gender segregation in industries, and enhance women's economic security. By leveraging existing government initiatives and resources, the platform will further the Australian Government's commitment to gender equality and economic empowerment for women.
Timeline for Implementation:	60 months

²⁴⁰ Folke, O., & Rickne, J. (2020). All the single ladies: Job promotions and the durability of marriage. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 12(1), 260-287. <https://doi.org/10.1257/app.20180496>

Status Quo:

Australia faces persistent gender disparities in the workforce, with women underrepresented in high-paying, male-dominated industries such as construction, mining, and utilities. Increasing women's participation in these sectors not only helps address skill shortages but also contributes to economic growth. Research indicates that closing the gender gap could boost Australia's GDP by \$195 billion.²⁴¹

The EOP is distinct from existing government initiatives like the Australian Skills Guarantee, and the National Skills Agreement in its targeted approach to addressing gender disparities in the workforce. The Australian Skills Guarantee primarily sets national targets for apprentices and trainees, including women, on government-funded projects, but does not provide the same level of personalised support and incentives for young women as the EOP. Similarly, the National Skills Agreement focuses on vocational education and training to boost productivity but lacks the EOP's targeted strategy for integrating young women into specific sectors. The EOP's comprehensive approach, which includes skills mapping, financial incentives, and partnerships with businesses for direct recruitment, is designed to close the gender gap in high-paying industries and empower young women economically, thereby contributing to Australia's economic growth.

Recommendation Details:

This policy recommendation proposes the creation of a nationwide Economic Opportunities Platform (EOP) designed to enhance employment prospects and economic empowerment for young women across Australia. The platform aims to address gender disparities in the labour market by aligning skill development with real-time market demands and providing tailored support, particularly in male-dominated industries.

Key Components of the Platform

- **Skills Mapping Database:** Develop a dynamic database categorising jobs by required skills and training duration. This involves collaboration with businesses, educational institutions, and training providers to anticipate future skill needs, particularly in male-dominated industries.
- **Incentives for Male-Dominated Industries:** Introduce financial incentives for businesses in male-dominated sectors to hire and train women. This could include tax breaks or subsidies for companies that achieve gender diversity targets.
- **Partnership with Businesses and Training Providers:** Establish partnerships with local businesses and training institutions to offer on-the-job training, internships, and certification courses. These partnerships will facilitate direct recruitment from the platform, ensuring a smooth transition from training to employment.
- **Customisable Training Plans:** Provide training plans tailored to individual skills and job requirements, focusing on pathways into male-dominated industries. These plans will guide users in acquiring necessary qualifications within a specified timeframe.

²⁴¹ Ferguson, A. (2013, March 8). Cost of gender gap put at \$195b. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/cost-of-gender-gap-put-at-195b-20130308-2fr6n.html>

- **Monitoring and Feedback System:** Implement a system to monitor the effectiveness of training programs and job matching. Feedback from participants and employers will be crucial for continuous improvement of the platform.
- **Outreach and Engagement:** Conduct targeted outreach to ensure accessibility for young women across Australia, especially those from disadvantaged or rural backgrounds. This will include collaboration with local councils and community organisations to address barriers such as access to childcare and digital tools.

Implementation Strategy

1. **Pilot Program:** Launch the platform in regions with high unemployment rates among young women or significant skill gaps, particularly in male-dominated industries. Evaluate the pilot's impact and gather feedback to refine the platform.
2. **National Rollout:** Expand the platform across Australia, incorporating ongoing feedback and adapting to changing economic conditions. Ensure continuous updates and improvements based on labour market trends and user needs.

8.3.2 Child Care Access Initiative

Recommendation:	Child Care Access Initiative
Objective(s):	To enhance economic empowerment and employment opportunities for young women across Australia by creating a dynamic Economic Opportunities Platform (EOP) that aligns skill development with real-time market demands, particularly in male-dominated industries.
Target Area:	Nationwide implementation with a focus on male-dominated industries such as construction, mining, and utilities, and prioritising outreach to young women, particularly those from disadvantaged or rural backgrounds, to bridge gender disparities in the workforce.
Rationale:	Australia's child care system, characterised by market-driven services and government subsidies, fails to adequately support non-standard work hours and faces significant workforce challenges. High turnover and low pay for child care workers, coupled with limited service availability outside typical hours, place immense pressure on families. The proposed Child Care Access Initiative seeks to address these gaps by introducing flexible, around-the-clock care options, enhancing workforce benefits, and incentivising employer-supported child care. These reforms are designed to reduce the financial and logistical burdens on families and increase the child care workforce. Literature asserts that availability of child care positively influences womens' employment. ²⁴²
Timeline for Implementation:	48 months

²⁴² Neuberger, F., Rüttenauer, T., & Bujard, M. (2022). Where does public childcare boost female labor force participation? Exploring geographical heterogeneity across Germany 2007–2017. *Demographic Research*, 46(24), 693-722. <https://doi.org/10.4054/DemRes.2022.46.24>

Status Quo:

The current child care system in Australia is primarily market-based with government subsidies. There is limited availability of non-standard hours care, with only 1.7% of services available after 6:30 pm on weekdays and 2% on weekends. Typical session lengths are 10-12 hours, and parents are charged for the full session regardless of the actual hours used. The child care workforce experiences high turnover due to low pay and feeling undervalued. Job vacancy rates for early childhood teachers increased by 30% over the year to May 2023. Additionally, there are no specific incentives for employers to provide child care support.

Recommendation Details:

24/7 Childcare Hubs

Establish 50 pilot 24/7 childcare centres in high-demand urban areas, offering care in 4-hour blocks bookable online. This directly addresses the current lack of non-standard hours care.

Rural Childcare Networks

Create a network of home-based childcare providers in rural areas, supported by a central resource centre. This tackles the shortage of childcare options in non-metropolitan areas.

Childcare Workforce Development

Offer a HECS-HELP style loan forgiveness program for childcare qualifications.

Employer Childcare Incentives

Offer new tax credits to employers who provide on-site childcare or subsidise local child care for employees, covering 35% of costs up to \$10,000 per employee annually.

Flexible Booking System

Develop a national app allowing parents to book and pay for childcare in 4-hour increments. This contrasts with the current rigid 10–12-hour session structure.

8.3.3 Parental Leave Incentives & Return-to-Work Support

Recommendation:	Parental Leave Incentives & Return-to-Work Support
Objective(s):	To promote gender equality in caregiving and support the career reintegration of parents by introducing adaptive parental leave pay, reserved partner leave, flexible leave usage, and structured return-to-work initiatives.
Target Area:	Nationwide application, focusing on increasing the uptake of parental leave by non-birthing parents (e.g., fathers) and providing comprehensive support for birthing parents returning to the workforce, with particular attention to addressing gender disparities in caregiving roles and economic participation.

Rationale:	The existing parental leave framework in Australia, although providing up to 20 weeks of leave at the minimum wage, fails to adequately promote father participation or offer robust return-to-work support. With fewer than 30% of new fathers taking paternity leave in 2021, the system clearly needs improvement. Studies show that short-term parental leave and child care availability boost women's employment, while long-term leave can be detrimental. Unconditional child benefits and joint couple's taxation have mixed impacts, supporting horizontal redistribution but potentially hindering women's employment. The proposed Parental Leave Incentives & Return-to-Work Support introduces a flexible and adaptive pay structure, non-transferable partner leave, and additional support measures such as a return-to-work bonus and a career reintegration program. These reforms aim to enhance parental leave benefits, encourage gender equality in child care, and support parents' smooth transition back to the workforce.
Timeline for Implementation:	9 months

Status Quo:

As of July 2023, Australian partners can claim up to 20 weeks of paid parental leave (PPL) between them, with single parents eligible for the full 20 weeks. This leave is compensated at the minimum wage rate. There are plans to increase the leave entitlement to 26 weeks by 2026. However, in 2021, less than 30% of new Australian fathers utilised publicly administered paternity leave. Additionally, there is limited structured support for parents returning to work after leave.

The Department of Social Services' Regulation Impact Statement (RIS) on Enhanced PPL for Families proposes under Option 3 that the existing Dad and Partner Pay (DaPP) and the 18-week Parental Leave Pay (PLP) will be combined into a single payment. This will result in up to 20 weeks of fully flexible payment that can be shared between eligible parents, allowing them to decide how to allocate leave. Additionally, the income eligibility criteria will be broadened. Instead of an individual income test, a household income test of \$350,000 per annum will be applied. This change aims to increase eligibility for financial support, especially for families where the mother is the higher income earner. However, this is unlikely to achieve the intended gender equality objectives as persistent gender norms denote women as primary caregivers, limiting men's leave uptake; career fears and social stigma discourage fathers from taking parental leave; and economic factors, like the gender pay gap, make it financially disadvantageous for higher-earning fathers, the majority of familial setups, to take leave. While the policy aims to be gender-neutral, the lack of specific incentives or reserved leave for fathers is unlikely to encourage an equitable or even somewhat equitable division of leave. Research suggests that PPL policies with designated or incentivised leave for fathers are much more effective in promoting gender equality in caregiving.²⁴³

²⁴³ Earle, A., Raub, A., Sprague, A., & Heymann, J. (2023). Progress towards gender equality in paid parental leave: an analysis of legislation in 193 countries from 1995–2022. *Community, Work & Family*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2023.2226809>

Recommendation Details:

Adaptive Parental Leave Pay

If non-birthing parents (e.g. fathers) take leave, replace the current flat minimum wage rate with a sliding scale. For the first 8 weeks, the rate should be 100% of their average weekly earnings (capped at twice the minimum wage) gradually decreasing to 70% by week 26.

Partner Leave Quota

Allocate 8 weeks of non-transferable paid leave specifically for non-birthing parents with a ‘use-it-or-lose-it’ provision. If not taken, this leave cannot be transferred to the mother.

Flexible Leave Usage

Allow parents to take leave in days rather than weeks in multiple blocks, and spread it over two years.

Return-to-Work Bonus

Introduce a new one-time \$2,500 tax-free bonus to birthing parents who return to work for at least 20 hours per week within 12 months of childbirth.

Career Reintegration

Mandate 2-4x meetings (depending on job industry and skill level) with managers for birthing parents returning after 16 weeks of leave to help them reintegrate into the workforce.

8.3.4 Augmenting Existing Women in STEM Scholarships

Recommendation:	Augmenting Existing Women in STEM Scholarships
Objective(s):	To enhance the appeal and effectiveness of STEM scholarships for women by embedding a focus on societal impact, interdisciplinary research, and public perception of STEM's social contributions, thereby attracting more women to pursue and sustain careers in STEM fields.
Target Area:	Nationwide implementation of enhanced STEM scholarship programs targeting young women, particularly those from diverse backgrounds, including Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities, rural areas, and those living with disabilities, with a focus on promoting careers that contribute to societal well-being.
Rationale:	Research indicates that women are more motivated by the social impact of their work compared to financial incentives alone. By explicitly linking STEM scholarships to opportunities for societal contribution, interdisciplinary research, and public communication of STEM's social benefits, this policy aims to align scholarship offerings with values that resonate more deeply with women. This approach is essential for increasing the participation of women in STEM fields, addressing gender disparities, and ensuring that STEM careers are viewed as meaningful and impactful avenues for societal improvement.

Timeline for Implementation:	3 months
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Status Quo:

The Australian Academy of Technological Sciences & Engineering offers the Elevate: Boosting Women in STEM program, which provides up to 500 scholarships over six years (2023-2029) across three categories: undergraduate, postgraduate research, and leadership. These scholarships range from \$30,000 for undergraduates to \$130,224.50 for postgraduate research, and up to \$70,000 for leadership roles. The program is designed to address gender inequities in STEM by fostering industry-academia collaborations, enhancing professional skills and networks, and promoting women into leadership roles. A notable feature is the emphasis on wellbeing during studies.

Similarly, the ACS Foundation funds the Women of STEM scholarships, offering financial support of \$5,000 per year to young women aged 17-20 pursuing STEM degrees. These scholarships aim to support diversity and inclusion by encouraging applications from various backgrounds, including Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities, rural areas, and those living with disabilities.

However, both scholarships currently lack an explicit emphasis on social impact, which is crucial given research indicating that women are more motivated by the social mission of their work compared to financial incentives alone. This gap presents an opportunity to align scholarship offerings with the values that resonate more deeply with women, thereby enhancing the appeal and effectiveness of these programs.

Recommendation Details:

1. Emphasise Societal Contribution

Recommendation

These scholarships should explicitly highlight how they can lead to projects, research, internships, and career opportunities that contribute to clear societal improvement. For example:

- Climate change mitigation, such as developing sustainable energy technologies or advancing environmental conservation efforts.
- Public health innovations, including research on pandemic preparedness, health equity, or medical technology aimed at underserved populations.
- Renewable energy projects that contribute to the transition towards a sustainable energy future.
- Sustainable development initiatives that address global challenges such as poverty reduction, clean water access, or food security.

Justification

Research reveals that women are more likely than men to prioritise the social responsibility of their employers and the societal impact of their work.²⁴⁴ Specifically, 35% of female MBA students are motivated by corporate social responsibility (CSR) and job impact, compared to 20% of male students.

²⁴⁴ Burbano, V., Padilla, N., & Meier, S. (2024). Gender differences in preferences for meaning at work. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 16(3), 61–94. <https://doi.org/10.1257/pol.20220121>

Additionally, data shows that women are 8.2 percentage points more likely than men to value jobs that help others.²⁴⁵ By embedding purpose-driven criteria into scholarship offerings, these programs can attract more women to STEM fields by aligning with their preference for work that contributes to societal good, thereby increasing the likelihood of them pursuing and sustaining STEM careers.

2. Embed Opportunities for Interdisciplinary Research

Recommendation

Within the scholarship, embed opportunities to participate in cross-disciplinary initiatives that integrate STEM with social sciences, humanities, or public policy to address complex societal challenges.

Examples of such projects could include:

- Collaborative research between engineers and social scientists to develop technology solutions that are culturally sensitive and tailored to the needs of specific communities.
- Partnerships between biologists and ethicists to explore the implications of genetic editing technologies on society and public health.
- Joint initiatives between computer scientists and political scientists to create more transparent and secure election systems that enhance democratic participation.

Justification

Interdisciplinary research fosters innovative solutions to multifaceted global challenges and aligns with the preferences of many women who seek meaningful work. By connecting students with cross-disciplinary projects, scholarships can broaden the appeal of STEM fields and demonstrate how STEM skills can be applied to solve pressing social issues. This not only increases the relevance of STEM education but also attracts women who are passionate about contributing to societal well-being through their work.

3. Strengthen Public Perception of STEM’s Social Impact

Recommendation

Enhance the public communication strategy around STEM scholarships by explicitly linking STEM careers to societal impact in all promotional materials, particularly those targeting school-aged girls. This could involve:

- Highlighting success stories of women in STEM who have made significant contributions to public health, environmental sustainability, or social equity through their work.
- Creating digital content, such as videos and infographics, that illustrate the tangible benefits of STEM careers for society, with a particular focus on how these fields address issues that matter to women.

Justification

The current narrative around STEM often emphasises “cool” technology (e.g., artificial intelligence) and high-income potential, which research suggests is less motivating for women compared to the opportunity

²⁴⁵ Whillans, A. V., Perlow, L., & Turek, A. (2017). Accepting lower salaries for meaningful work. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 1649. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01649>

to make a social impact.²⁴⁶ By shifting the focus towards the societal benefits of STEM careers, these programs can better resonate with young women and challenge the stereotype that STEM fields are abstract or disconnected from real-world issues. This change in perception is essential for attracting more women to STEM and ensuring that they see these fields as avenues for meaningful and impactful careers.

8.3.5 Female-Focused Career Enhancement for HR Staff

Recommendation:	Female-Focused Career Enhancement for HR Staff
Objective(s):	To enhance the capacity of HR staff to effectively support women’s career progression by providing targeted training on the specific challenges women face in the workplace, including gender biases, barriers to advancement, and the impact of personal relationships on career growth.
Target Area:	Human resources departments across organisations, both large and small, nationwide, with a focus on integrating this targeted training into ongoing HR development programs to ensure consistent and meaningful support for women at all career stages, from entry-level to leadership positions.
Rationale:	The implementation of peer-led workshops at key career stages addresses the gap in existing career support systems by directly confronting the influence of relationship dynamics on women's career choices. By integrating these workshops into existing programmes, the initiative ensures minimal disruption to current structures while adding significant value. Informing women about the research allows them to self-assess their situations and make informed decisions that align with their ambitions. The peer-led nature of the workshops fosters a collaborative learning environment, which is essential for challenging deeply ingrained societal norms and empowering women to prioritise their professional aspirations alongside or independent of their relationship status. This targeted intervention is a cost-effective way to enhance women's agency, career progression, and earnings potential.
Timeline for Implementation:	15 months

Recommendation Details:

Implement targeted training for HR staff focused on the specific career challenges women face. These concise sessions should be integrated into ongoing HR development and cover critical topics such as gender biases, barriers to advancement, and the impact of romantic relationships and workplace dynamics on women’s career progression.

The training will equip HR staff with practical strategies to support women at various career stages, from entry-level positions to leadership roles. This includes ensuring equitable access to opportunities and addressing biases that impede women’s growth. HR staff will also be trained to discuss these issues

²⁴⁶ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2021. Transforming Trajectories for Women of Color in Tech. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/26345>.

directly with women, providing tailored guidance and support to help them navigate their career paths effectively.

By ensuring HR is prepared to engage in meaningful conversations and offer targeted support, the aim is to foster a workplace environment where women can advance based on merit.

8.3.6 Gender-Sensitive Career Tool

Recommendation:	Gender-Sensitive Career Tool
Objective(s):	To empower young women in university and TAFE by providing a comprehensive, gender-sensitive career tool that helps them identify and pursue their career ambitions while addressing the unique challenges they may face, such as gender biases, confidence gaps, and societal expectations.
Target Area:	Educational institutions across Australia, including universities and TAFE, with the tool also being accessible through online career platforms. The focus is on providing young women with a secure and supportive environment to explore and advance their career goals, equipped with practical strategies and insights tailored to their specific needs.
Rationale:	The Gender-Sensitive Online Career Self-Assessment tool is a focused and scalable intervention designed to directly address the unique challenges faced by young women in Australia as they plan their careers. This approach not only helps women recognise and overcome internalised gender norms and societal pressures but also equips them with the confidence and skills needed to pursue advanced roles and leadership positions. The personalised action plan ensures that each user receives targeted advice and resources.
Timeline for Implementation:	18 months

Recommendation Details:

Develop and implement a Gender-Sensitive Career Tool targeted specifically at young women in university and TAFE. This tool will be accessible through educational institutions and online career platforms, offering a private and secure environment for women to explore their career ambitions.

The tool will include the following key components:

1. **Career Ambition Assessment**
A module where users assess their career aspirations, including desired roles, industries, and leadership positions. This section will guide them through a series of questions designed to help them identify both their short-term and long-term career goals, with specific prompts that challenge them to think beyond societal expectations and relationship dynamics.
2. **Gender-Specific Warnings and Insights**
Integrated into each stage of the assessment, the tool will provide context-specific warnings and insights that address common barriers faced by women. For instance, when exploring leadership

roles, the tool will highlight how women often underestimate their readiness for these positions due to societal conditioning or lack of confidence. It will also explain how partnership dynamics can influence career decisions, encouraging users to critically evaluate these factors and consider how they might impact their ambitions.

3. Confidence and Competence Module

A dedicated section focusing on self-perception and confidence. Users will take a self-evaluation quiz designed to reveal areas where they may undervalue their skills or experience. Based on their responses, the tool will offer tailored advice on building confidence, such as seeking mentorship, practising assertiveness, and recognising competence beyond traditional gender roles.

4. Job Application Guidance

A practical module that addresses the tendency of women to only apply for roles where they meet all listed qualifications. This section will offer guidelines on evaluating job opportunities, helping users understand when they should apply even if they don't meet every criterion. The tool will include real-world examples and research-backed advice on how to overcome the fear of not being fully qualified and how to approach job descriptions with a more strategic mindset.

5. Overcoming Implicit Bias and Microaggressions

A resource section providing strategies for identifying and responding to implicit bias and microaggressions in the workplace. This part of the tool will offer scenarios and role-playing exercises that simulate common workplace situations where women might face subtle forms of discrimination. It will also provide advice on how to address these issues, either through direct communication or by seeking support from HR or relevant workplace resources.

6. Personalised Action Plan:

At the end of the assessment, users will receive a personalised action plan that summarises their career goals, identifies potential barriers, and offers specific steps to overcome these challenges. This action plan will include resources such as links to mentorship programmes, recommended reading on leadership for women, and contacts for career counselling services available through their university or TAFE.

8.3.7 Workplace Interventions to Mitigate GBV Perpetration & Exposure

YWA's original time progression analysis of GBV (Gender-Based Violence) perpetration and exposure reveals the critical intersections between career/employment and increased risk/likelihood through several key correlations. By understanding these correlations, we can identify precise intervention points and methods to mitigate these risks effectively. These interventions align with repeated statements in 'Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality', particularly under the section 'What others can do: action outside of government,' which emphasises collective action from workplaces and communities. Additionally, these interventions have significant benefits for overall workplace culture and productivity. Employers are vested in preventing GBV due to its significant workforce and productivity costs. "Without appropriate action to address violence against women and their children, production-related costs in 2021-22 will be borne primarily by employers at \$235 million (39%). The community will also

bear considerable costs of \$172 million (28%) followed by victims/survivors at \$112 million.²⁴⁷ Workplace sexual harassment alone costs the Australian economy an estimated \$3.8 billion.²⁴⁸

Strong Correlations with GBV Perpetration

For Men

1. High personal and mental health distress.
2. Beliefs about power dynamics in the workplace.
3. Impact of gender on career and financial education.
4. Difficulty seeing women's perspectives in disagreements.
5. Use of substances to cope with stress.
6. Feeling gender limits professional goals.
7. Experiencing workplace sexual harassment.

Strong Correlations with GBV Exposure

For Women

1. Experiencing workplace sexual harassment.
2. Impact of gender on career and financial education.
3. Mental health concerns from gender issues.

Intervention Points

1. Early career stages: Onboarding and initial training periods.
2. Ongoing employment: Regular intervals throughout employment.
3. High-stress periods: Times of organisational change, high workloads, or performance reviews.
4. Incident response: Immediately following reports of harassment or discrimination.

Intervention Methods

For Men

1. Mental health support and stress management:

What: Comprehensive Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or wellbeing programs (e.g. <https://mindfi.co/>) offering mental health counselling, stress management workshops, and resources on healthy coping mechanisms.

How: Introduce during onboarding, provide ongoing support, and offer targeted interventions during high-stress periods.

²⁴⁷ Department of Social Services, Australian Government. Economic Cost of Violence against Women and Their Children. *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children*. <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/women/publications-articles/reducing-violence/national-plan-to-reduce-violence-against-women-and-their-children/economic-cost-of-violence-against-women-and-their-children>

²⁴⁸ Deloitte Access Economics, *Report for the Sexual Harassment National Inquiry: The Economic Costs of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace* (March 2020) <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/pages/economics/articles/economic-costs-sexual-harassment-workplace.html>

2. Gender equality and healthy relationship training:

What: Mandatory training sessions on gender equality, consent, and healthy workplace relationships, challenging harmful stereotypes and power dynamics.

How: Implement during onboarding with annual refresher courses, including role-playing scenarios.

3. Inclusive workplace culture and policies:

What: Develop and enforce strict anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies, with regular training on recognition, reporting, and prevention. Ensure genuine change from harassment reports.

How: Continuously foster an inclusive environment, conduct periodic reviews and updates to policies, and ensure safe reporting channels.

4. Emotional intelligence and conflict resolution workshops:

What: Workshops to develop emotional intelligence, effective communication, and conflict resolution skills.

How: Schedule regular workshops and one-on-one sessions as needed, focusing on understanding and managing emotions and resolving conflicts constructively.

Intervention Methods

For Women

1. Support for gender-related career challenges:

What: Mentorship programs and career development workshops addressing gender bias, with strategies for career advancement and financial education.

How: Offer early in the career and at key promotion points, with networking opportunities and mentorship from successful female role models.

2. Workplace harassment and discrimination procedures:

What: Robust procedures for reporting and addressing workplace harassment and discrimination, with multiple reporting channels and prompt investigations.

How: Continuously enforce, provide immediate support for reported incidents, and ensure counselling and legal assistance are available.

Rationalisation

By implementing these detailed and targeted interventions within the workplace, organisations can effectively address the factors contributing to GBV perpetration and exposure. This aligns with the goals and recommendations outlined in ‘Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality’, which calls for collective action from all sectors of society.

Further Recommendations:

YWA asked young women, who participated in the interview and responded to the survey, what would be most helpful in de-segregating industries by gender. In other words what would be helpful in encouraging individuals to pursue any job they want? Addressing this, recommendations, with customised policy for industries by educational attainment, include:

Among the seven options presented, women's wellbeing and safety in male-dominated workplaces emerges as the most important factor across all groups. It receives the highest overall rating. Women with a bachelor's degree or higher rate this factor slightly better (8.13 out of 10) than those without a bachelor's degree (7.73 out of 10).

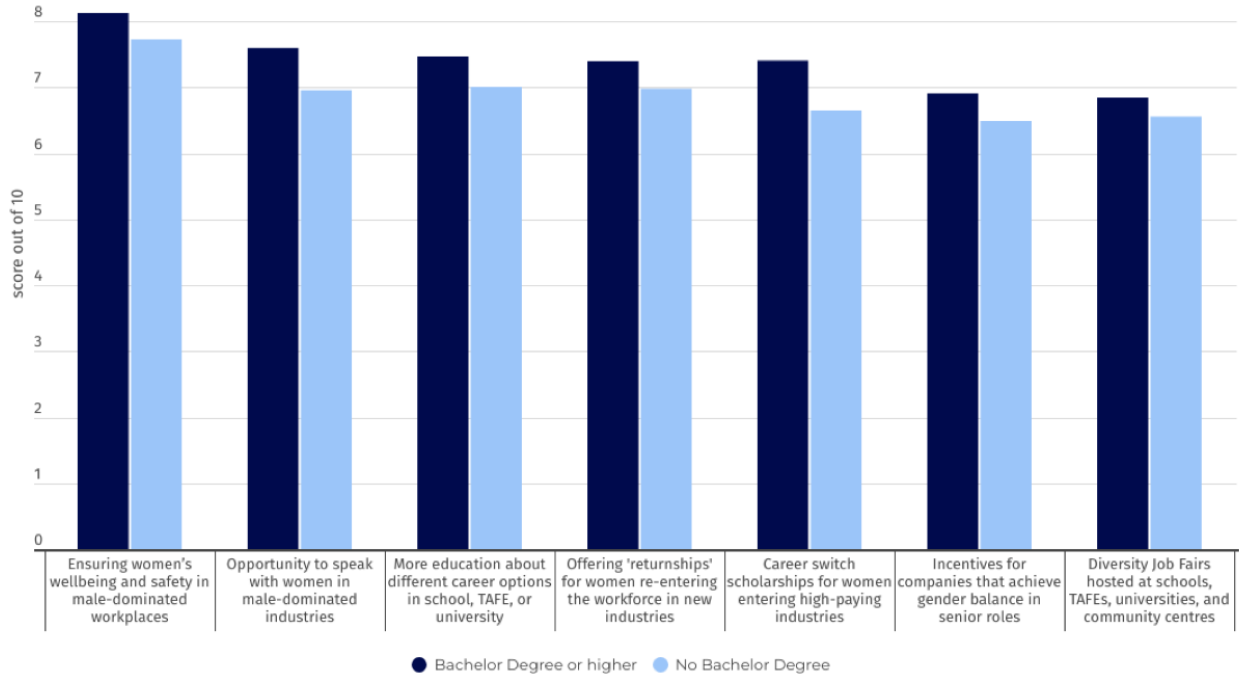
The second most highly rated factor is the opportunity to speak with women in male-dominated industries. A notable difference is observed between education levels, with those holding a bachelor's degree or higher rating this factor at 7.60 compared to 6.96 for those without a bachelor's degree.

Ranked third in importance is more information about different career options in school, TAFE, or university. Again, those with a bachelor's degree or higher place greater emphasis on this option, scoring it at 7.47 compared to 7.01 for those without a bachelor's degree.

The fourth highest-rated factor is offering 'returnships' for women re-entering the workforce in new industries. The difference in perception based on education level persists, with degree holders rating it at 7.40 compared to 6.98 for non-degree holders.

Across all four top-rated factors, women with a bachelor's degree or higher consistently give higher ratings than those without, suggesting that education level influences perceptions of what would be most helpful in encouraging women to pursue any career they want. The high scores for all factors indicate that young Australian women generally view these measures as quite helpful in de-segregating industries by gender.

Figure 29: Career Policy Preferences by Education Level



FINANCIAL SECURITY

9.1 The Situation

What does existing research say about young people's, particularly young women's experiences?

Young Australian women struggle with financial literacy, trailing behind their male peers. This stems from childhood as girls are less likely than boys to be taught about investing and saving at an early age (41% of boys, 29% of girls).²⁴⁹ Consequently, young women are hindered in managing finances, saving, and investing effectively. They feel unprepared to make financial decisions and are more stressed about the cost of living. This makes financial independence elusive and increases the difficulty of leaving abusive relationships, providing for any children, avoiding poverty in later life, accessing medical care, and retiring.

9.1.1 Self-Assessment & Understanding Core Concepts

Financial literacy among young Australian women is notably lower compared to their male counterparts and older women. Approximately one-third of young women (aged 18-29) rate their financial literacy as “fair” or “poor,” a rate significantly higher than any other demographic group.^{250 251} Many young women do not understand fundamental financial concepts such as compound interest, inflation, and risk diversification.^{252 253} This limited understanding underpins a broader issue of low confidence in financial decision-making.^{254 255} The deficiency in core financial skills impedes young women's ability to make informed decisions, manage debt, and build wealth over time.

Further, 37% of women admit they don't know much about finances, against 27% of men, and 47% of women don't know where to start with financial management, versus 38% of men. Researching ways to grow wealth is less common among women, with only 14% frequently doing so compared to 21% of men, limiting their potential for long-term financial growth.²⁵⁶

ASIC's Young People and Money Survey 2021, which studied 3,035 young Australians aged 15-21, revealed awareness of voluntary superannuation contributions was higher among males (59%) than

²⁴⁹ CommBank. (2017). *Enabling change: a fresh perspective on women's financial security*. Australia.

²⁵⁰ “Financial Literacy a Key to Lower Hardship for Younger Australians - NAB News.” 2023. NAB News. November 30, 2023. <https://news.nab.com.au/news/financial-literacy-a-key-to-lower-hardship-for-younger-australians/>.

²⁵¹ Baldini, Cassandra. 2023. “Why Young Women Are Facing Financial Disaster.” Money Magazine. Money magazine. November 29, 2023. <https://www.moneymag.com.au/young-women-financial-disaster>.

²⁵² Mousina, Diana. 2023. “Econosights - Financial Literacy Gender Gap.” Amp.com.au. AMP. July 31, 2023. <https://www.amp.com.au/insights-hub/blog/investing/econosights-financial-literacy-gender-gap>.

²⁵³ Lusardi, Annamaria, and Olivia S Mitchell. 2014. “The Economic Importance of Financial Literacy: Theory and Evidence.” *Journal of Economic Literature* 52 (1): 5–44. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jel.52.1.5>.

²⁵⁴ Mousina, Diana. 2023. “Econosights - Financial Literacy Gender Gap.” Amp.com.au. AMP. July 31, 2023. <https://www.amp.com.au/insights-hub/blog/investing/econosights-financial-literacy-gender-gap>.

²⁵⁵ Lusardi, Annamaria. 2019. “Financial Literacy and the Need for Financial Education: Evidence and Implications.” *Zeitschrift Für Schweizerische Statistik Und Volkswirtschaft/Schweizerische Zeitschrift Für Volkswirtschaft Und Statistik/Swiss Journal of Economics and Statistics* 155 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41937-019-0027-5>.

²⁵⁶ “24-023MR New Moneysmart Data Reveals Young Women More Stressed than Young Men about Finances, Cost of Living | ASIC.” 2022. Asic.gov.au. 2022. <https://asic.gov.au/about-asic/news-centre/find-a-media-release/2024-releases/24-023mr-new-moneysmart-data-reveals-young-women-more-stressed-than-young-men-about-finances-cost-of-living/>.

females (37%). Additionally, more males felt very comfortable dealing with financial institutions (53% vs. 42%) and were confident about having a financially secure adult life (56% vs. 46%).²⁵⁷

A similar sentiment is echoed in the results of the 16th wave of the HILDA Survey (2022). Of 26,691 Australians, men scored 10% better than women on the financial literacy test (mean score of 3.5/5 for women and 4/5 for men) which comprised 5 questions about numeracy, inflation, portfolio diversification, risk versus return and money illusion.²⁵⁸

These consistent findings across surveys underscore the enduring gender gap in financial literacy.

9.1.2 Financial Attitudes & Behaviours

ASIC Moneysmart's 2024 research²⁵⁹ highlights significant differences in financial behaviours and attitudes between Gen Z women and men. Personal savings habits reveal that 11% of Gen Z women have no personal savings, compared to just 4% of men. The usage of buy-now-pay-later services is higher among women (32%) than men (25%), indicating a propensity towards immediate gratification financial tools that can lead to increased debt. Additionally, only 12% of women own shares, compared to 22% of men, reflecting a lower engagement with investment opportunities that could enhance long-term financial security. However, 25% of women spend at least 15 minutes a week tracking their spending, compared to 19% of men, which shows an area where women might be more proactive in managing their finances, despite overall lower financial literacy.

9.1.3 Consequences of Financial Literacy Gaps

The financial literacy gap, created and concretised in youth, has serious, life-long consequences for Australian women:

- Lower Income: Women typically earn less than men, and this income disparity is compounded by lower financial literacy, which affects their ability to negotiate salaries, manage career progression and invest their savings.^{260 261}
 - Superannuation Balances: Women's superannuation balances are, on average, 21% lower than those of men at retirement age, partly due to lower financial literacy and career interruptions.²⁶²
- The gap in median superannuation balances for women and men approaching retirement (ages

²⁵⁷ "Young People and Money -Survey Snapshot." n.d. <https://files.moneySMART.gov.au/media/kjvjabp5/young-people-and-money-survey-snapshot.pdf>.

²⁵⁸ https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/4382057/HILDA_Statistical_Report_2022.pdf

²⁵⁹ "24-023MR New Moneysmart Data Reveals Young Women More Stressed than Young Men about Finances, Cost of Living | ASIC." 2022. Asic.gov.au. 2022. <https://asic.gov.au/about-asic/news-centre/find-a-media-release/2024-releases/24-023mr-new-moneysmart-data-reveals-young-women-more-stressed-than-young-men-about-finances-cost-of-living/>.

²⁶⁰ Mousina, Diana. 2023. "Econosights - Financial Literacy Gender Gap." Amp.com.au. AMP. July 31, 2023. <https://www.amp.com.au/insights-hub/blog/investing/econosights-financial-literacy-gender-gap>.

²⁶¹ "Improving Financial Literacy for Women Is a Necessity." 2024. Firstlinks. March 5, 2024. <https://www.firstlinks.com.au/improving-financial-literacy-women-necessity>.

²⁶² Mousina, Diana. 2023. "Econosights - Financial Literacy Gender Gap." Amp.com.au. AMP. July 31, 2023. <https://www.amp.com.au/insights-hub/blog/investing/econosights-financial-literacy-gender-gap>.

60–64) is 25.1% (or \$53,190).²⁶³ By 2030, men’s projected superannuation at retirement is expected to be \$432, 000, while women’s is expected to be \$262, 000.²⁶⁴

- Investment Returns: Poor financial literacy leads to suboptimal investment decisions, resulting in lower returns and slower wealth accumulation.²⁶⁵
- Emergency Funds: A significant number of young women lack adequate emergency savings, leaving them vulnerable to financial shocks. One in four Australians, including many young women, report not having enough money for an emergency.^{266 267}
- Debt: Financially illiterate individuals are more likely to incur high levels of debt and use high-cost borrowing methods, such as payday loans, which can lead to financial instability and bankruptcy.^{268 269}
- Confidence and Financial Freedom: Lower financial literacy is associated with reduced confidence in financial decision-making, leading to less financial freedom and poorer living standards.^{270 271}
- Mental Health: Financial stress due to poor money management skills can take a toll on mental health, contributing to anxiety and depression.^{272 273}

Interestingly, when women do invest they are more successful than men; they have a 12% greater return.²⁷⁴

9.2 Primary Research

What does YWA research, including our survey, interviews, literature reviews, and expert consultations, say about young people’s, particularly young women’s experience?

²⁶³ Australian Taxation Office (ATO). (2023). *Taxation statistics 2020-21, Snapshot Table 5, Chart 12, Median super balance by age and sex.*

²⁶⁴ Koukoulas, S. (2018). *Defining the concept of economic security for all women: Policy recommendations to boost women’s economic security.* EconomicSecurity4Women: Australia.

²⁶⁵ Lusardi, Annamaria. 2019. “Financial Literacy and the Need for Financial Education: Evidence and Implications.” *Zeitschrift Für Schweizerische Statistik Und Volkswirtschaft/Schweizerische Zeitschrift Für Volkswirtschaft Und Statistik/Swiss Journal of Economics and Statistics* 155 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41937-019-0027-5>.

²⁶⁶ “Financial Literacy a Key to Lower Hardship for Younger Australians - NAB News.” 2023. NAB News. November 30, 2023. <https://news.nab.com.au/news/financial-literacy-a-key-to-lower-hardship-for-younger-australians/>.

²⁶⁷ Baldini, Cassandra. 2023. “Why Young Women Are Facing Financial Disaster.” Money Magazine. Money magazine. November 29, 2023. <https://www.moneymag.com.au/young-women-financial-disaster>.

²⁶⁸ Lusardi, Annamaria. 2019. “Financial Literacy and the Need for Financial Education: Evidence and Implications.” *Zeitschrift Für Schweizerische Statistik Und Volkswirtschaft/Schweizerische Zeitschrift Für Volkswirtschaft Und Statistik/Swiss Journal of Economics and Statistics* 155 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41937-019-0027-5>.

²⁶⁹ “The Cost of Financial Illiteracy.” 2023. IFAC. April 17, 2023. <https://www.ifac.org/knowledge-gateway/discussion/cost-financial-illiteracy>.

²⁷⁰ Mousina, Diana. 2023. “Econosights - Financial Literacy Gender Gap.” Amp.com.au. AMP. July 31, 2023. <https://www.amp.com.au/insights-hub/blog/investing/econosights-financial-literacy-gender-gap>.

²⁷¹ “The Cost of Financial Illiteracy.” 2023. IFAC. April 17, 2023. <https://www.ifac.org/knowledge-gateway/discussion/cost-financial-illiteracy>.

²⁷² “Young Australians Let down by Lack of Financial Education - Way Forward.” 2022. Way Forward. 2022. <https://wayforward.org.au/young-australians-let-down-by-lack-of-financial-education/>.

²⁷³ Baldini, Cassandra. 2023. “Why Young Women Are Facing Financial Disaster.” Money Magazine. Money magazine. November 29, 2023. <https://www.moneymag.com.au/young-women-financial-disaster>.

²⁷⁴ Kane, L. (2015). *These 10 charts show how differently men and women approach investing.* Business Insider. February 12. Available from: <https://www.businessinsider.com.au/how-men-and-women-invest-2015-2?r=US&IR=T>.

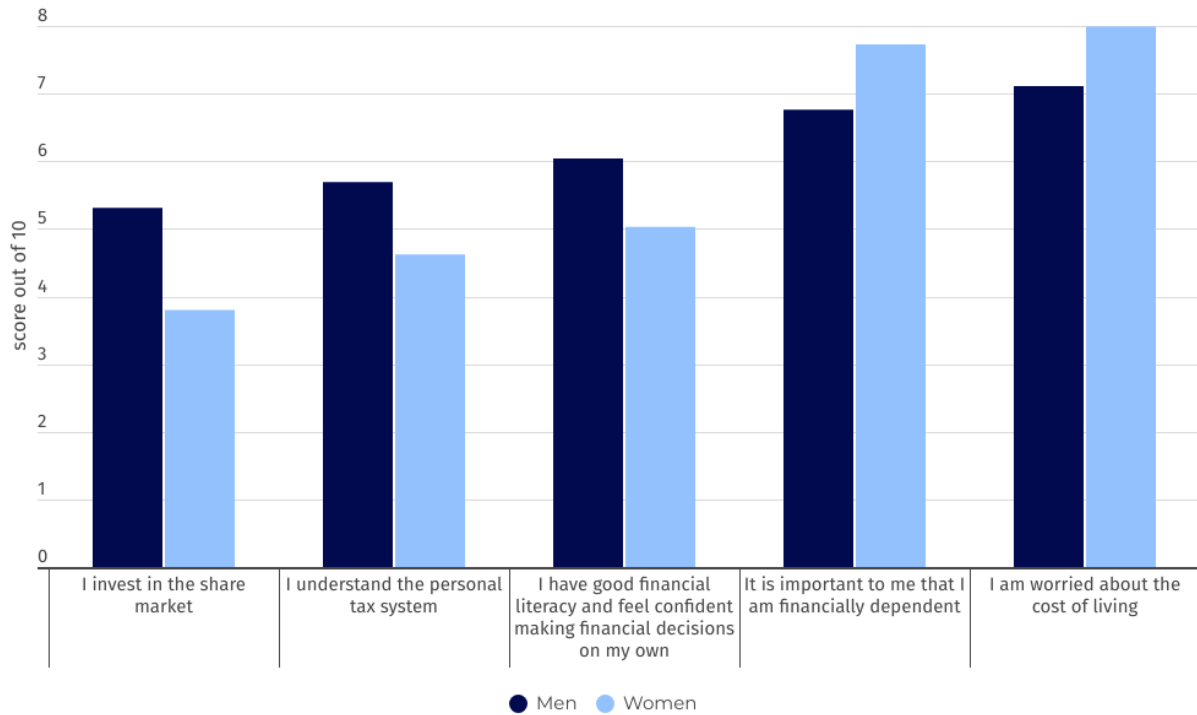
9.2.1 Survey Findings

Synonymous with broader findings, in YWA’s survey young women are notably less involved in stock market investments and less knowledgeable about the personal tax system than men. They also report lower financial literacy and less confidence making financial decisions independently. Despite these gaps, women place a higher importance on being financially independent and express greater concern about the cost of living. This paradox highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions to enhance young women's financial autonomy.

Table 18: Financial Education by Gender

Financial Education by Gender Variable	Gender Identity	
	Men	Women
I invest in the share market	5.31 (6.00)	3.80 (4.00)
I understand the personal tax system	5.69 (6.00)	4.62 (5.00)
I have good financial literacy and feel confident making financial decisions on my own	6.04 (6.00)	5.03 (5.00)
It is important to me that I am financially independent	6.76 (7.00)	7.73 (8.00)
I am worried about the cost of living	7.11 (7.00)	7.99 (9.00)

Figure 30: Financial Education by Gender



9.2.1.1 Systemic Inequities in Financial Education

Systemic inequities refer to structural, institutionalised patterns and practices that result in unequal access to resources, opportunities, and outcomes based on characteristics such as gender, race, or socioeconomic status. In the context of financial education, these inequities manifest as disparities in access to financial knowledge, tools, and resources, which can hinder certain groups' ability to achieve financial literacy and independence.

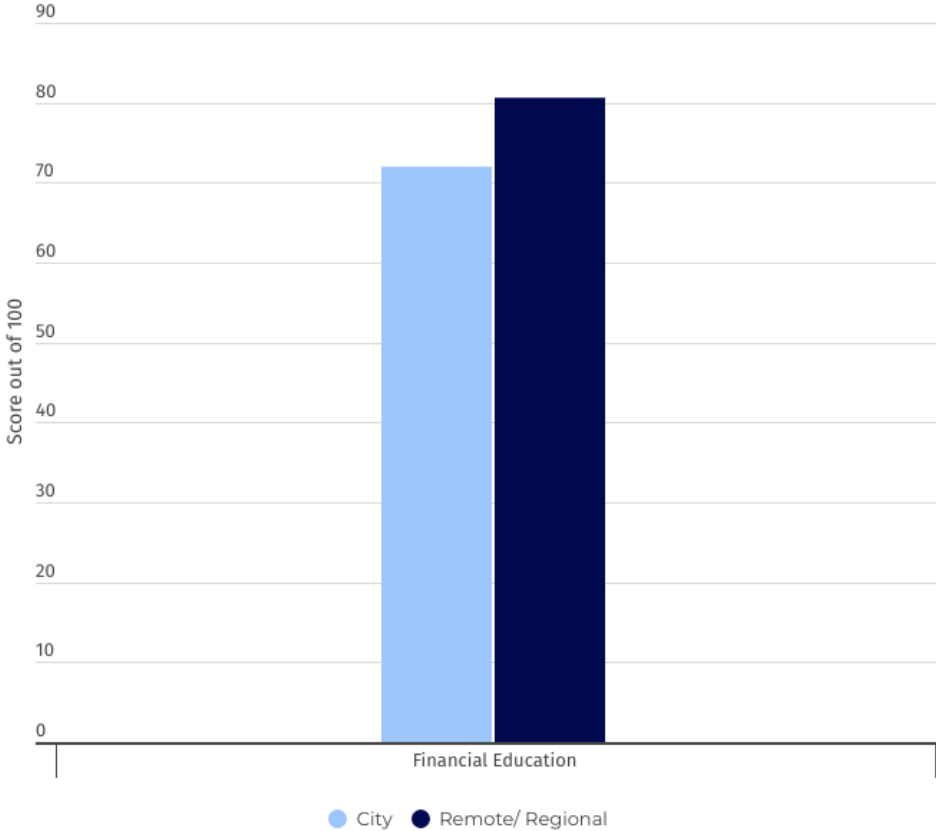
The YWA survey highlights systemic inequities in financial education. Notably, 80.6% of young women acknowledge the existence of at least one problem related to financial education in remote and regional areas as compared to 72.0% in major cities.

Table 19: Prevalence of systemic Inequities by Area

Prevalence of systemic Inequities (% of young women who agreed on the relevance of at least one problem in the domain)	Area (current)	
	City	Remote/Regional
Variable		

Financial Education	72.0%	80.6%
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Figure 31: Prevalence of systemic Inequities by Area



9.2.1.2 Specific Systemic Inequities in Financial Education

The data reveals critical areas of systemic inequity in financial education for young Australian women with significant variations based on geographical location:

Lack of Understanding the Personal Tax System: A significant number of young women report difficulties understanding the personal tax system. This issue is more prevalent in remote/regional areas (53.2%) compared to cities (42.5%). These findings align with broader survey results showing lower comprehension of tax-related matters among women.

Gender Limiting Professional Goals: Many young women feel that their gender has restricted their professional aspirations, with remote/regional respondents (39.6%) reporting slightly higher rates than those in cities (37.1%). This limitation exacerbates the confidence gap in financial decision-making highlighted in the initial findings.

Lack of Financial Literacy and Confidence: This problem is more pronounced in remote/regional areas (43.6%) compared to cities (32.9%), reflecting a broader trend of lower financial confidence among women.

Negative Impact of Gender on Financial Education Access: This issue is consistently recognised across all areas, underscoring systemic barriers women face in acquiring financial knowledge.

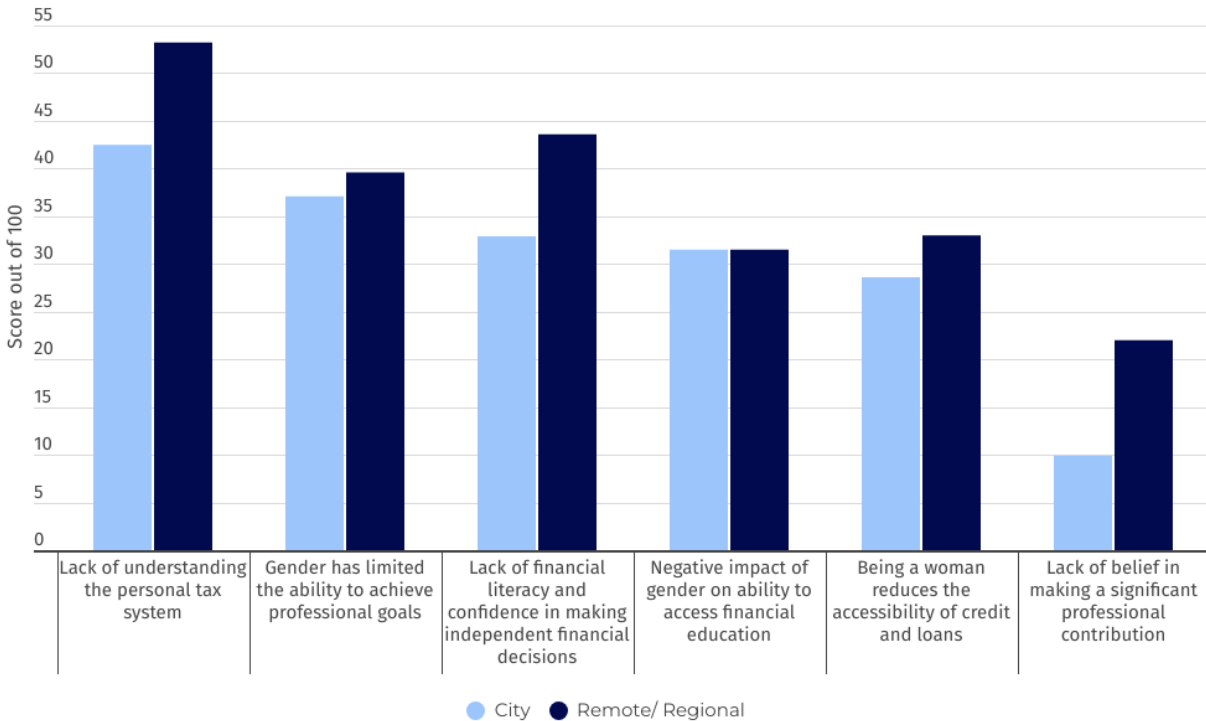
Reduced Accessibility to Credit and Loans: It is reported that being a woman limits access to credit and loans, with higher rates of this belief in remote/regional areas (33.0%) compared to cities (28.6%).

Lack of Belief in Professional Contribution: Young women in remote/regional areas (22.0%) are less likely than those in cities (9.9%) to believe in their ability to make a significant professional contribution.

Table 20: Prevalence of systemic Inequities by Area

Prevalence of systemic inequities (% of young women who agreed (rating 6-10 out of 10) that the problem exists)	Area (current)	
	City	Remote/Regional
Lack of understanding the personal tax system	42.5%	53.2%
Gender has limited the ability to achieve professional goals	37.1%	39.6%
Lack of financial literacy and confidence in making independent financial decisions	32.9%	43.6%
Negative impact of gender on ability to access financial education	31.5%	31.5%
Being a woman reduces the accessibility of credit and loans	28.6%	33.0%
Lack of belief in making a significant professional contribution	9.9%	22.0%

Figure 32: Prevalence of systemic Inequities by Area



9.2.1.3 Correlation Between Educational Experiences and Financial Education

These systemic inequities often begin with educational experiences and are perpetuated throughout women's financial lives. Negative educational experiences due to gender discrimination are strongly correlated with perceived barriers to accessing financial education and credit. Conversely, positive educational experiences, such as feeling confident after high school or encountering educational materials that reflect women's perspectives, correlate with better financial literacy, confidence in financial decision-making, and ease in finding well-paying jobs. Perceptions of boys being smarter or experiencing gender biases correlates with concerns about the cost of living and reduced accessibility to financial resources.

9.2.1.4 Gender Discrimination and Financial Education

Women's perceptions of gender discrimination in their educational experiences show significant positive correlations with their concerns about gender-based barriers in accessing financial education, credit, and loans. This suggests that gender biases in education may translate into perceived obstacles in financial spheres. Internalised notions of male academic superiority negatively correlate with the importance placed on financial independence and concerns about the cost of living, implying that such beliefs might dampen women's financial ambitions and awareness.

9.2.1.5 Educational Confidence and Financial Outcomes

Confidence instilled through education is a strong predictor of financial confidence and optimism. Women who left high school feeling more self-assured consistently showed greater confidence in their financial literacy, budgeting and savings strategies, understanding taxes, and securing well-paying jobs. Exposure to educational materials reflecting women's perspectives also correlates positively with various

financial outcomes, including job prospects, budgeting and saving, tax comprehension, and overall financial literacy.

9.2.1.6 Awareness of Gender Issues and Financial Priorities

Perceptions of adequate institutional support for gender-related educational challenges show positive correlations with financial literacy, job optimism, and faith in meritocracy.

9.2.1.7 Financial Education and Career Progression

Inadequate financial education triggers a domino effect, producing poor financial literacy and hindering women's career progression. Feeling that financial independence is important strongly correlates with ambition and the belief in making a significant professional contribution.

Conversely, perceiving gender as a barrier to accessing financial education or credit strongly correlates with the belief that gender limits professional achievements and heightened risk of workplace sexual harassment. Concerns about the cost of living are negatively correlated with accepting gender-based income disparities and the belief that men are better leaders. Positive financial literacy and confidence in budgeting correlate with career ambition and perceived professional competence.

Financial literacy and confidence are crucial for career success and ambition, while gender-based financial barriers significantly impact professional aspirations and experiences.

9.2.2 Interview Insights

Interviews reveal that young Australian women face substantial financial stress due to low incomes, high living costs, and systemic barriers. This stress impacts their ability to afford essentials, housing, and education, often leading to reliance on credit and further exacerbating stress and limiting life choices. Many struggle to balance work, study, and financial obligations, requiring support from family or government. Proposed solutions include reducing interest rates, increasing welfare, and providing financial education. Policy reforms to address gender pay gap, improve parental leave policies, and foster financial literacy are crucial for achieving financial stability and gender parity.

An overwhelming number of those interviewed (81%) emphasise the need for improved financial education to achieve financial security. Many lack understanding of basic financial concepts like budgeting, investing, and managing debt, leading to financial instability. This knowledge gap is due to insufficient financial literacy education in schools and societal norms discouraging women's engagement with financial matters. While some women educate themselves through resources like podcasts and social media, these efforts are often inadequate or piecemeal. There is strong consensus that comprehensive financial education should be integrated into the education system from an early age to empower women and ensure informed financial decisions.

9.3 Policy Recommendations

Based on these learnings from primary research, YWA recommends the following **targeted policy recommendations** to address the identified issues.

9.3.1 Financial Education in the Australian Curriculum

Recommendation:	Financial Education in the Australian Curriculum
Objective(s):	To establish financial literacy as a core component of the Australian Curriculum, ensuring consistent and comprehensive financial education for all students across the country, while enhancing teacher training and resources to improve the quality and effectiveness of financial literacy instruction.
Target Area:	Nationwide implementation across all year levels in Australian schools, with a focus on integrating financial literacy into existing subjects such as Mathematics, HASS, and Economics and Business. The policy also targets teacher professional development and continuous monitoring to ensure the effective delivery of financial literacy education.
Rationale:	Improving financial literacy among Australians requires embedding it in the education system. This includes making financial literacy a mandatory part of the national curriculum, integrating it across core subjects with practical applications, and developing targeted modules on key financial topics. Increasing awareness through targeted social media campaigns and providing robust professional development programs for teachers will equip educators to effectively teach financial literacy. Monitoring and evaluation through standardised assessments will refine and enhance financial education programs. Specific attention to rural and regional areas and those from low-income families can enable targeted intervention.
Timeline for Implementation:	12 months

Status Quo:

Analysis of the state of financial literacy in the formal education system indicates the need to streamline and integrate it into the national curriculum. Customisation based on region specific indicators could lead to addressing region specific gaps in financial literacy. This approach ensures standardisation as well flexibility best suited for the demography. Currently, financial literacy is not taught as a standalone subject but is embedded within various disciplines, primarily Mathematics and Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS). In Mathematics, financial literacy concepts are incorporated under the “Number and Algebra” strand, covering practical applications such as budgeting, interest calculations, and financial problem-solving. Within HASS, financial literacy is addressed in Economics and Business, focusing on economic systems, financial risks and rewards, and consumer rights and responsibilities.

Resources and programs like Moneysmart for teachers and Talk Money aim to enhance students' financial skills through practical and engaging materials. Nevertheless, the coverage of financial literacy within the curriculum is inconsistent and often insufficient. A systematic approach to teaching financial literacy is lacking, resulting in significant variability in how and to what extent it is taught across different schools and states. Many financial literacy topics are optional, leading to inconsistent coverage and dependence on individual teacher initiative. Furthermore, a substantial proportion of teachers, particularly in

Mathematics, are not specifically trained in financial education, exacerbating the inconsistent delivery of financial literacy education.

Recommendation Details:

1. Integrate Financial Literacy into the National Curriculum

- Embed financial literacy as a core component of the Australian Curriculum across all year levels, making it a compulsory subject.
- Integrate financial literacy topics into existing subjects such as Mathematics, HASS, and Economics and Business.
- Develop specific modules on budgeting, saving, investing, credit management, and consumer rights.
- Align financial literacy content with practical, real-life applications to enhance relevance and engagement.
- Utilise MoneySmart Teaching resources to support curriculum integration and provide real-world contexts for financial learning.
- Implement standardised assessments to measure students' financial literacy levels at key stages of their education.
- Use assessment data to refine and improve the curriculum continuously.

2. Increase Awareness of Commonwealth Financial Counselling

Utilise social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok to run targeted awareness campaigns about Commonwealth Financial Counselling services.

3. Enhance Teacher Training and Resources

Provide professional development programs for teachers, focusing on financial literacy concepts and teaching strategies. Offer ongoing training and support through workshops, webinars, and online resources. Leverage existing resources to create high-quality, curriculum-aligned teaching resources, including lesson plans, case studies, and interactive activities. Ensure resources are easily accessible and regularly updated.

4. Implement Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation

Integrate a bi-yearly short, online, standardised assessment to measure financial literacy levels among students. Use assessment results to inform curriculum improvements and policy decisions. Adjust programs based on evaluation findings.

9.3.2 Universal Basic Income (UBI) for Victim-Survivors of DFSV

Recommendation:	Universal Basic Income (UBI) for Victim-Survivors of DFSV
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Objective(s):	To provide financial stability and empower women who are victim-survivors of domestic, family, and sexual violence (DFSV) through a targeted Universal Basic Income (UBI) pilot program, coupled with comprehensive financial education and support services, enabling them to achieve independence and make informed decisions about their future.
Target Area:	Nationwide pilot program with a focus on women identified as victim-survivors of DFSV, particularly those in the most severe situations. The program will target financial stability, job training, mental health support, child care assistance, and community-building initiatives to address the multifaceted challenges faced by these women.
Rationale:	<p>Implementing UBI for victim-survivors of DFSV, prioritised by severity, aims to enhance their economic independence, reduce financial stress, and empower them to leave or avoid abusive situations. The economic impact of violence against women in Australia is significant, estimated at \$22-26 billion annually, encompassing healthcare, legal, and judicial expenses, lost productivity, social services, welfare payments, and intergenerational impacts.²⁷⁵ Providing targeted UBI can reduce these costs.</p> <p>Flexible funding has proven effective in preventing homelessness among DFSV survivors, with evidence showing that 94% of clients maintain housing stability six months after receiving financial support. This suggests that providing direct financial assistance can significantly improve the stability and well-being of DFSV survivors.²⁷⁶</p> <p>Combining UBI with holistic support through referral to relevant services (job training, mental health, child care assistance) helps mitigate the various forms of resource loss experienced by DFSV survivors.²⁷⁷ This approach not only improves mental health outcomes but also enhances resilience and the ability to leave or avoid abusive situations, ultimately reducing the long-term incidence and impacts of DFSV.</p>
Timeline for Implementation:	12 months

Status Quo:

Currently, women experiencing domestic, family, and sexual violence (DFSV) face significant financial challenges that impede their ability to leave or avoid abusive situations.²⁷⁸ These challenges include low income, high living costs, and systemic barriers that impact their ability to afford essentials, housing, and education. Financial insecurity often forces these women to rely on credit, exacerbating their stress and

²⁷⁵ KPMG. (2016). *The cost of violence against women and their children in Australia*.

²⁷⁶ Sullivan, C. M., Bomsta, H. D., & HacsKaylo, M. (2016). Flexible funding as a promising strategy to prevent homelessness for survivors of intimate partner violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 34(14), 3017-3033. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260516664318>

²⁷⁷ Sullivan, C. M., Guerrero, M., Simmons, C., López-Zerón, G., Ayeni, O. O., Farero, A., Chiamonte, D., & Sprecher, M. (2023). Impact of the Domestic Violence Housing First Model on Survivors' Safety and Housing Stability: 12-Month Findings. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 38(5-6), 4790–4813. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605221119520>

²⁷⁸ Summers, A. (2022). *The choice: Violence or poverty*. Paul Ramsay Foundation.

limiting their life choices. Many struggle to balance work, study, and financial obligations, often requiring support from family or government programs. Existing financial assistance and support services are often insufficient to address the immediate and long-term financial needs of these women.

Recommendation Details:

Implement a Targeted UBI Pilot Program for Victim-Survivors of DFSV

- Identification: Collaborate with police to identify women who are victim-survivors of DFSV through police reports and verification at the scene of incidents; prioritise women in the most severe situations.
- Payments: Provide monthly unconditional payments sufficient to cover basic needs, estimated at a minimum living wage level to ensure financial stability into a personal account. Create mechanisms to ensure privacy of the receivers in accessing the payments.
- Duration: Offer the program for a minimum of 12 months to allow women sufficient time to stabilise their financial situation and make informed decisions about their future.
- Evaluation: Conduct a rigorous evaluation, including a cost-benefit analysis and longitudinal studies, to assess the program’s impact on participants’ financial independence, well-being, and ability to avoid or leave abusive situations.

Combine UBI with Comprehensive Financial Education and Support Services

- Financial Education: Include a mandatory online financial education course for UBI recipients covering budgeting, saving, investing, credit management, and consumer rights.
- Assessment: Integrate the Financial Strain Survey (FSS)²⁷⁹ for ongoing assessment to monitor financial stress levels and tailor support services accordingly.

Implement a Holistic UBI Program Addressing Multiple Resource Losses

- Connect those in the UBI program with job training (employment assistance programs to enhance skills and employability, including resume building, interview preparation, and job placement services), mental health services (counselling, therapy, and support groups to address trauma and promote mental well-being), child care assistance (child care assistance to support workforce participation and alleviate the burden of child care costs), and community initiatives (community-building initiatives to enhance social support networks, including peer support groups, community workshops, and local resource centres).

9.3.3 Trust Fund for Low-Income Children

Recommendation:	Trust Fund for Low-Income Children
Objective(s):	To break the cycle of poverty and enhance socio-economic mobility for low-income children in Australia by establishing a Government Trust Fund that

²⁷⁹ Lin, H. F., Postmus, J. L., Hu, H., & Stylianou, A. M. (2023). IPV Experiences and Financial Strain Over Time: Insights from the Blinder-Oaxaca Decomposition Analysis. *Journal of family and economic issues*, 44(2), 434–446. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-022-09847-y>

	provides financial resources for education, skills training, stable housing, and long-term financial security.
Target Area:	Nationwide implementation, targeting low-income children across Australia, with special provisions for estranged children. The policy focuses on providing financial support that can only be accessed for essential needs, such as rent, education, skills training, and housing deposits, ensuring that children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the resources and opportunities to build a stable and prosperous future.
Rationale:	Establishing a trust fund for low-income children in Australia aims to provide meaningful financial support for essential needs, enhance financial literacy, and promote socio-economic equity. By ensuring automatic enrollment and simplifying access, the program ensures that all eligible children benefit. Targeted financial education and community outreach will empower children/adults to make informed financial decisions and maximise the benefits of the trust fund. Addressing socio-economic disparities through uniform contributions and targeted support ensures that the program benefits those who need it most. Monitoring and evaluation will help refine the program, ensuring its effectiveness and adaptability.
Timeline for Implementation:	24 months

Status Quo:

Low-income children in Australia face significant socio-economic challenges that limit their opportunities for education, skills training, and stable housing. Financial insecurity often leads to difficulties in affording basic necessities and hinders long-term planning for their future. Existing support systems provide limited assistance and fail to offer a comprehensive solution that addresses both immediate and future needs. As a result, children from low-income families are at a disadvantage, perpetuating cycles of poverty and limiting their potential for socio-economic mobility.²⁸⁰

Recommendation Details:

Establish a Government Trust Fund for Low-Income Children

- Eligibility will include all children from low-income families, with additional provisions for estranged children.
- Initial contributions will be provided by the government.
- Annual contributions will be made by the government to each fund.
- Access age for the funds will be set at 18, or 15 for estranged children.
- Funds can only be used for rent, education, skills training, or a house deposit.
- Accounts will be managed by a trustee until the child reaches the age of access.

²⁸⁰ Productivity Commission. "Fairly Equal? Economic Mobility in Australia." Research Paper, Productivity Commission.

Financial Modelling

- With a 3% interest rate, the initial contribution is \$348.59, with annual contributions of \$348.59.
- With a 5% interest rate, the initial contribution is \$327.56, with annual contributions of \$327.56.
- With a 7% interest rate, the initial contribution is \$267.62, with annual contributions of \$267.62.
- These calculations ensure that the trust will have a value of \$10,000 by the time the child turns 18.

Account Management

- A designated trustee, such as a government agency or financial institution, will manage the accounts until the child reaches the age of access.
- Financial education about the trust fund, access, and uses will be integrated into the financial curriculum described previously.

Access and Usage

- Children can access their funds at age 18. Estranged children can access their funds at age 15.
- Funds can only be used for rent, education, skills training, or a house deposit. The trustee will oversee fund disbursements to ensure compliance with these restrictions.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Implement a robust monitoring system to track account activity, engagement, and outcomes.
- Conduct annual evaluations to assess the program's effectiveness, financial literacy improvements, and socio-economic impacts.

Mitigating Challenges from Previous Schemes

- Ensure automatic enrollment for all eligible children, with clear communication to parents and guardians. Develop an online platform for parents and children to manage their accounts and access information.
- Partner with educational institutions to deliver mandatory financial literacy programs tailored to different age groups. Utilise community organisations to provide ongoing support and education to families.
- Ensure equitable benefits by providing uniform government contributions without requiring parental contributions. Implement outreach programs to ensure low-income families are aware of and can maximise the benefits of the scheme.
- Restrict fund usage to essential needs such as rent, education, skills training, and housing deposits. Trustees will oversee fund disbursements to ensure compliance with usage restrictions.
- Establish a comprehensive framework for continuous monitoring and evaluation, with regular reports on engagement rates, financial outcomes, and socio-economic impacts. Use evaluation findings to make timely adjustments to the program, improving its effectiveness and addressing emerging challenges.
- Utilise multiple communication channels, including digital platforms, schools, and community organisations, to ensure all eligible families are informed about the scheme. Partner with

educational institutions, financial organisations, and community groups to maintain awareness and engagement.

9.3.4. Employer Investment in Women's Training and Development

Recommendation:	Employer Investment in Women’s Training and Development
Objective(s):	To increase women's access to firm-specific training and development opportunities, thereby enhancing their career advancement and reducing gender disparities in the workplace by providing financial incentives for companies that invest in the skill development of their female employees.
Target Area:	Nationwide implementation across all sectors in Australia, targeting companies that employ female workers and are willing to invest in their professional development through approved training programs. The policy specifically focuses on encouraging firms to prioritise and support the learning and development of female employees to close the gender skills gap and promote gender equality in the workplace.
Rationale:	<p>Encouraging companies to invest in women's skill training through a 20% payroll tax rebate addresses a critical barrier to gender equality in the workplace. This financial incentive reduces the cost burden on companies, making it more feasible for them to allocate resources towards the professional development of female employees. By targeting a broad range of sectors, the policy ensures that women across different industries have access to essential training opportunities.</p> <p>The eligibility criteria are designed to ensure that the investment in training is meaningful and impactful. By setting a minimum training investment requirement, the policy ensures that companies are genuinely committed to developing their female workforce. The employment tenure criterion promotes long-term retention and development, benefiting both employees and employers. Ensuring that the training is relevant to the employee's role or career progression maximises the effectiveness of the training, leading to better career outcomes for women and improved productivity for companies.</p> <p>Example implementations demonstrate the practical benefits of the policy. For instance, a tech company investing \$3,000 in advanced coding training for a female software developer employed for one year would receive a \$600 rebate on payroll tax. Similarly, a manufacturing firm spending \$5,000 on leadership training for a female manager employed for two years would receive a \$1,000 rebate. These examples illustrate how the rebate can significantly offset training costs, encouraging more companies to invest in women's skill development.</p> <p>By setting the payroll tax rebate at 20%, the government provides a substantial incentive for companies to prioritise the training and development of their female employees. This policy change promotes gender equality, enhances the overall skill level of the workforce, and benefits the broader economy. The anticipated outcomes include increased participation of women in training</p>

	programs, improved career advancement opportunities, and a more skilled workforce, contributing to economic growth and productivity.
Timeline for Implementation:	9 months

Status Quo:

One of the main factors in women's low occupational achievements is limited access to firm-specific training. Despite various initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality in the workplace, many employers still do not invest adequately in the training and development of their female employees. “According to the 2024 Randstad Workmonitor research, 72% of women surveyed highlight the importance of learning and development (L&D) as vital to them in their careers, compared to 66% of men. Despite this clear desire and need for L&D, women are less likely to have received this support from their employer, with less than half of women (46%) indicating they have received L&D support from their employer to future-proof their careers, compared with more than half (55%) of men.”²⁸¹ This lack of investment leads to a skills gap, limiting women's career advancement and contributing to persistent gender disparities in many sectors. Without targeted interventions, women continue to face barriers in accessing essential training opportunities, which hampers their professional growth and organisational performance.

Recommendation Details:

1. Eligibility
 - Companies across all sectors that invest in skill training for female employees, excluding apprenticeships where other rebates exist.
2. Rebate Amount
 - 20% rebate on payroll tax for wages paid to female employees undergoing approved training programs.
3. Training Programs
 - Must be registered with recognised training providers and relevant to the employee's role or career advancement.
4. Duration
 - The rebate applies for the duration of the training program, up to a maximum of two years.
5. Cap
 - Maximum rebate of \$2,000 per employee per year.

Eligibility Bar

To qualify for the rebate, companies must meet the following criteria:

1. Minimum Training Investment

²⁸¹ Randstad. (2024). *Investing in women through upskilling*. Randstad Australia. <https://www.randstad.com.au/investing-women-through-upskilling/>

- Companies must spend at least \$2,000 per female employee on approved training programs annually.
- 2. Employment Tenure
 - The female employee must have been employed for at least six months before commencing the training.
- 3. Training Relevance
 - The training must be relevant to the employee's current role or a clearly defined career progression path within the company.

Additional Recommendations:

YWA surveyed young women to determine the most effective measures for ensuring their financial independence and security. The responses revealed significant demographic differences, based on education and income levels.

By Education

Women with a bachelor's degree or higher place the most importance on significant housing affordability measures, rating it at 8.04 out of 10. This factor receives the highest ratings from degree holders, indicating their concern for affordable housing as a critical component of financial security. Scholarships or loans for women to cover expenses during unpaid internships is also ranked highly, with those holding a degree valuing this support at 7.68 compared to 6.85 from those without.

Government subsidies for employers providing paid leave and flexible work arrangements are another key measure for higher-educated respondents, scoring 7.56 compared to 6.95 from non-degree holders. These women show a clear preference for workplace policies that support flexibility and work-life balance. In contrast, measures such as additional Centrelink assistance (7.04 vs. 6.85), microloans for young entrepreneurs (6.54 vs. 6.34), sliding-scale tuition policies (6.41 vs. 5.96), and pay-it-forward tuition programs (5.94 vs. 5.73) do not show significant differences based on education level. This suggests that while all young women see value in these initiatives, those with higher education prioritise targeted financial support and workplace flexibility.

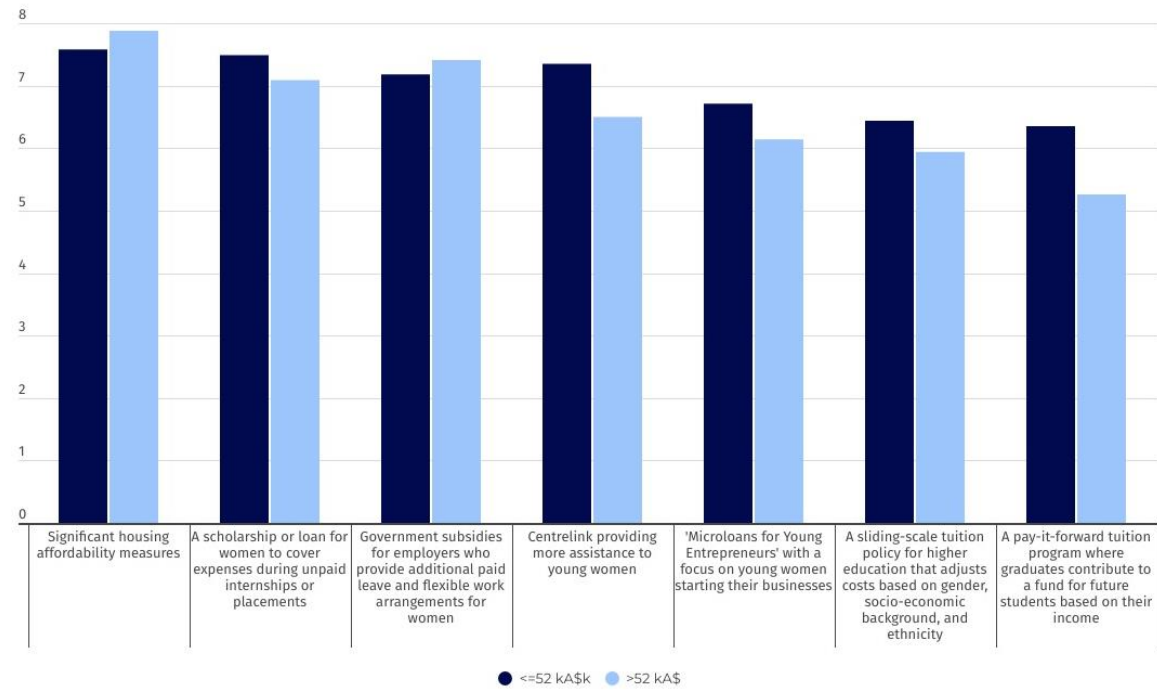
By Income

Respondents earning 52,000 AUD or less per year place greater importance on direct financial support measures. Additional Centrelink assistance is rated 7.35 by lower-income respondents compared to 6.50 by higher-income respondents. Microloans for young entrepreneurs are also valued more by lower-income respondents, scoring 6.71 compared to 6.14 from higher-income respondents. These women also rate sliding-scale tuition policies (6.44 vs. 5.94) and pay-it-forward tuition programs (6.35 vs. 5.26) more highly, indicating a need for flexible education financing options.

In contrast, measures such as significant housing affordability (7.58 vs. 7.88), scholarships or loans for unpaid internships (7.49 vs. 7.09), and government subsidies for paid leave and flexible work arrangements (7.18 vs. 7.41) do not show significant differences based on income. This highlights that lower-income respondents prioritise immediate financial aid and educational flexibility to a greater extent than their higher-income counterparts.

Policymakers should consider these demographic differences and deploy more customised policy to promote financial independence and security for young Australian women.

Figure 33: Financial Security Policy Preferences by Income



POLITICAL AGENCY

10.1 The Situation

What does existing research say about young people's, particularly young women's experiences?

Young women face systemic barriers including but not limited to sexism, racism and exclusionary political environment. However, their political activism has seen them lead significant movements like the #LetHerSpeak campaign and advocate for legislative reform such as the removal of the tampon tax. While they often feel unprepared and unsafe in the political sphere, young women's energy and determination, as well as frustration with aspects of their life and society, underscore the necessity for greater representation, cultural change, and improved political education.

10.1.1 Political Exclusion and Disillusionment

Young Australian women feel excluded from the political landscape, citing sexism, misogyny, racism, homophobia, and transphobia as significant barriers.^{282 283} 72% of young Australian women do not perceive politics as an equal or inclusive space for them.^{284 285} Currently, only 29% of Federal Parliamentarians are women, with 56% of young women and 33% of young people believing that female politicians are treated unfairly by their male colleagues. The percentage of women in the Australian parliament has increased from 25% in 2001 to 39% by 2022 but still remains low.²⁸⁶

Further, research indicates young women feel a deep disillusionment with their political leaders. 60% of surveyed young women believe that politicians do not act in their best interests. This level of discontent is significantly higher than the global average of 43%.^{287 288 289} Moreover, 53% of Australian respondents reported that political decisions increase their stress and anxiety.^{290 291}

²⁸² Boecker, Brianna. 2022. "Australian Young Women Feel Excluded from Politics Compared to Other Countries: Research." Women's Agenda. October 4, 2022. <https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/australian-young-women-feel-excluded-from-politics-compared-to-other-countries-research/>.

²⁸³ "'Double Disillusion': New Global Survey Finds Australia Lags the World When It Comes to Girls and Young Women's Trust and Participation in Politics - Plan International Australia." 2022. Plan International Australia. October 4, 2022. <https://www.plan.org.au/media-centre/new-global-survey-finds-australia-lags-the-world-when-it-comes-to-girls-trust-and-participation-in-politics/>.

²⁸⁴ Ibid

²⁸⁵ Boecker, Brianna. 2022. "Australian Young Women Feel Excluded from Politics Compared to Other Countries: Research." Women's Agenda. October 4, 2022. <https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/australian-young-women-feel-excluded-from-politics-compared-to-other-countries-research/>.

²⁸⁶ "Trends in the Gender Composition of the Australian Parliament." 2022. Aph.gov.au. 2022. https://www.aph.gov.au/About/Parliament/Parliamentary_departments/Parliamentary_Library/Research/FlagPost/2022/April/Trends-gender-parliament.

²⁸⁷ Boecker, Brianna. 2022. "Australian Young Women Feel Excluded from Politics Compared to Other Countries: Research." Women's Agenda. October 4, 2022. <https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/australian-young-women-feel-excluded-from-politics-compared-to-other-countries-research/>.

²⁸⁸ "'Double Disillusion': New Global Survey Finds Australia Lags the World When It Comes to Girls and Young Women's Trust and Participation in Politics - Plan International Australia." 2022. Plan International Australia. October 4, 2022. <https://www.plan.org.au/media-centre/new-global-survey-finds-australia-lags-the-world-when-it-comes-to-girls-trust-and-participation-in-politics/>.

²⁸⁹ ABC News. 2022. "Australian Women and Girls Are Significantly More Disillusioned with Politics than Overseas Counterparts - ABC News," October 3, 2022. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-10-04/australian-women-are-more-disillusioned-with-politics-/101498022>.

²⁹⁰ Ibid

²⁹¹ Boecker, Brianna. 2022. "Australian Young Women Feel Excluded from Politics Compared to Other Countries: Research." Women's Agenda. October 4, 2022. <https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/australian-young-women-feel-excluded-from-politics-compared-to-other-countries-research/>.

10.1.2 Political Engagement

Despite their disillusionment, young women remain politically engaged. 97% of young Australian women believe that participating in politics is important, and 83% have engaged in political activities.^{292 293 294}

However, awareness of government policies and programs remains low. In YWA's primary research methods only 4% of young men and 17% of young women were aware of Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality. When asked to state government programs that they might be eligible for or that could benefit them, young people struggled to cite any beyond the NDIS, Medicare, HELP loans, and public education. This is compounded by a lack of confidence in their political knowledge and skills. This often adds to young women feeling unprepared to run for public office.²⁹⁵

10.1.3 Barriers to Political Careers

Only 12% of young women express a desire to pursue a career in national politics. 30% of young women wouldn't consider politics because of their cultural or ethnic background, highlighting concerns of systemic exclusion.^{296 297} Many are deterred by the perception of a toxic culture and unsafe environment within Parliament.²⁹⁸ Only 1 in 10 young Australian women think Parliament is a safe place to work.²⁹⁹ These fears are not unfounded with women in Federal Parliamentary workplaces experiencing sexual assault (40% vs 26%) and sexual harassment (63% vs 24%) far more often than men.^{300 301}

This is within the backdrop of Australia's performance in global indicators: In 2024, Australia ranked 24th out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index, a rise from 26th in 2023 but still lower than its 15th place in 2006. For political empowerment, Australia is 28th, up from 29th in 2023 and 50th in 2022. It is ranked 33rd for women in parliament, down from 31st in 2022. Australia is 17th for women in ministerial positions, an improvement from 19th in 2023 and a significant leap from 64th in 2022.

²⁹² Ibid

²⁹³ ABC News. 2022. "Australian Women and Girls Are Significantly More Disillusioned with Politics than Overseas Counterparts - ABC News," October 3, 2022. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-10-04/australian-women-are-more-disillusioned-with-politics-/101498022>.

²⁹⁴ "Double Disillusion": New Global Survey Finds Australia Lags the World When It Comes to Girls and Young Women's Trust and Participation in Politics - Plan International Australia." 2022. Plan International Australia. October 4, 2022. <https://www.plan.org.au/media-centre/new-global-survey-finds-australia-lags-the-world-when-it-comes-to-girls-trust-and-participation-in-politics/>

²⁹⁵ Ghazarian, Zareh, Laura Woodbridge, Jacqueline Laughland-Booy, and Zlatko Skrbis. 2023. "Investigating the Ambitions of Young Women to Run for National Parliament: The Case of Australia." *Australian Journal of Political Science* 58 (4): 461–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2023.2269866>.

²⁹⁶ Ibid

²⁹⁷ "Most Young Women Don't See Politics as an Equal Space for Diverse Backgrounds, Survey Finds." SBS News. 2022. <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/most-young-women-dont-see-politics-as-an-equal-space-for-diverse-backgrounds-survey-finds/3o60d24ka>.

²⁹⁸ "Just One in Ten Australian Young Women Believe the Culture in Our Nation's Parliament Is Safe for Women, and Most Want Men to Do Better in Calling out Sexism - Plan International Australia." 2021. Plan International Australia. April 14, 2021. <https://www.plan.org.au/media-centre/just-one-in-ten-australian-young-women-believe-the-culture-in-our-nations-parliament-is-safe-for-women-and-most-want-men-to-do-better-in-calling-out-sexism/>.

²⁹⁹ Davey, Melissa. 2021. "One in 10 Young Australian Women Believe Work Culture in Federal Politics Is Safe." *The Guardian*. The Guardian. March 30, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/mar/31/one-in-10-young-australian-women-believe-work-culture-in-federal-politics-is-safe>.

³⁰⁰ "Four in 10 Women in Politics Report Sexual Harassment." 2021. *thenewdaily.com.au*. November 30, 2021. <https://www.thenewdaily.com.au/news/2021/11/30/kate-jenkins-report-parliament>.

³⁰¹ ABC News. 2021. "Review Finds 1 in 3 Staff in Federal Parliament Experience Sexual Harassment - ABC News," November 30, 2021. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-11-30/sexual-haassment-report-parliament-brittany-higgins/100660894>.

Additionally, Australia is 46th for years with a female head of state, having had three years under Julia Gillard from 2010 to 2013.³⁰²

10.1.4 Calls for Change

Young Australian women call for significant changes to make politics more inclusive and democratic. They advocate for:

- Seeing more diverse and inclusive representation in Parliament. Women’s visibility in decision-making encourages political ambitions among young women.
- A majority want stronger actions from men in politics to call out sexism and create a safer, more equitable work environment.
- Enhancing political knowledge and confidence through education and training programs to help foster political ambitions ([Civics and Citizenship](#) being a good step).

10.2 Primary Research

What does YWA research, including our survey, interviews, literature reviews, and expert consultations, say about young people’s, particularly young women’s experience?

10.2.1 Survey Findings

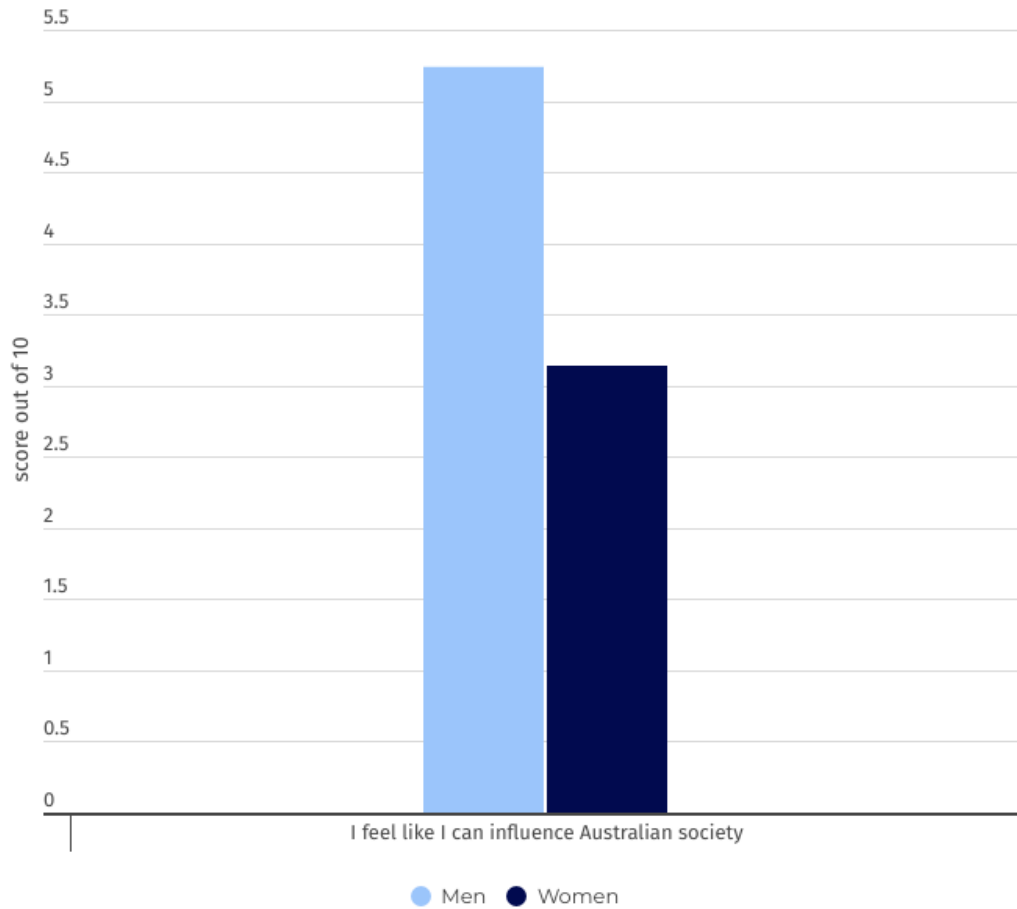
In the survey, a striking gender disparity in perceived societal influence is observed. On average, men reported feeling significantly more able to influence Australian society compared to women, with median scores of 5 for men and 3 for women, highlighting a stark difference. Women’s limited belief in their ability to effect change has consequential impacts on their engagement in civic and political processes.

Table 21: Political Agency by Gender

Political Agency by Gender Variable	Gender Identity	
	Man	Woman
I feel like I can influence Australian society	5.24 (5.00)	3.14 (3.00)

³⁰² “Gender Scorecard 2024: Women in Australian Politics - Pathways to Politics.” 2024. Pathways to Politics. July 10, 2024. <https://pathwaystopolitics.org.au/knowledge-hub/scorecard-women-political-representation/#global>.

Figure 34: Political Agency by Gender



Further, the survey demonstrates that addressing gender issues is associated with electoral support in Australia. Firstly, a significantly smaller proportion of women than men feel that their ideas and desires are adequately represented and advocated for by Australian politicians. Secondly, more than half of men and three-quarters of women indicate they are more likely to vote for a politician who actively addresses gender issues.

According to a recursive partitioning model (classification tree), **the key differentiator in voting plans is gender identity**. 43% of men plan to vote for the Labor party, 24.5% for the Liberals, 19.4% for the Greens, and 4.2% for the Nationals. Among women, support for the Greens is 34.3%, Labor 31.4%, Liberal 15.7%, and Nationals 6.0%. Among women who would like more government support in housing, support for the Greens reaches 39%.

Table 22: Political Agency by Gender

Voting Plans	Gender Identity
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Variable	Man	Woman
I plan to vote for Greens	19.4%	34.3%
I plan to vote for Independents	4.4%	6.0%
I plan to vote for Labor	43.0%	31.4%
I plan to vote for Liberal	24.5%	15.7%
I plan to vote for Nationals	4.2%	6.0%
I plan to vote for Other	4.5%	6.7%
I would be more likely to vote for a politician if they did more on gender issues	52.1%	77.6%
I want current governments to do more for young people	91.7%	95.6%
I feel like my ideas and desires are reflected and advocated by Australian politicians	35.2%	27.8%

Regression analysis demonstrates that various factors significantly influence the probability of voting for different parties.

Greens

- Voters who seek more support in their interpersonal relationships.
- Voters whose beliefs about traditional gender roles are influenced by religion.

Independents

- Voters who support environmental issues.
- Voters who prefer annual reports to convey the gendered impacts of policy.

Labor

- Voters who desire government subsidies for women’s paid leave.
- Voters who seek flexible work arrangements.

Liberal

- Voters who support incentives for gender balance in senior roles.
- Voters who are influenced by social media campaigns.

Nationals

- Voters who desire more education about career options.

Other Parties

- Voters who need more support in health-related areas.

10.2 Interview Insights

Young women highlight three thematic challenges, organised by summary of main points, representative quotes, words most mentioned, problems most mentioned, and solutions most mentioned.

10.2.1 Theme 1: Political Representation and Engagement

Summary of main points:

1. Young Australian women feel underrepresented and marginalised in politics, perceiving it to be dominated by older, white men.
2. There’s a strong call for increased female and intersectional representation in politics, especially for First Nations women.
3. Many young women feel excluded from policy-making processes and lack knowledge on how to influence policy.
4. Despite feelings of disillusionment, some young women actively participate in political engagement through submissions, youth parliaments, and social media.
5. There’s a need for better public education on political processes and more accessible engagement opportunities.

Representative quotes:

1. “When I picture a room full of Australia's politicians, I picture white men in their 50s to 60s who might have daughters and, oh, that's their only real insight into what life is like for a young woman.”
2. “First Nations women need to be put at the front.”
3. “I've gone through high school and two university degrees, and I haven’t been given any information about how to influence policy or programmes.”
4. “I've been a leading force in pushing different submissions and working to meet different stakeholders across different government bodies and across civil society to push for multiple different recommendations to do so. But I know how rare that is and it's because I've had deep

trauma in my life that I've felt I must do something no matter how many obstacles there are, how unpaid it is, and how confusing it is."

5. "Or, you know, having advisory bodies works well, I think, too, but kind of selecting advisory bodies that are quite representative is really important for that."

Words most mentioned:



Problems most mentioned:

1. Severe underrepresentation of young women and diverse groups in politics, leading to policies that don't adequately address their needs
2. Systemic lack of education and information on how to influence policy and engage in political processes
3. Dominance of older, white men in political decision-making, creating a disconnect with young women's experiences
4. Exclusion of young women from meaningful policy-making processes, resulting in feelings of powerlessness
5. Insufficient public education on political engagement, contributing to political apathy among young women
6. Limited pathways and support for young women to enter politics, especially those from underprivileged backgrounds.

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Implement quotas or targets to increase female and intersectional representation in politics, with a specific focus on elevating First Nations women to leadership positions
2. Develop and integrate comprehensive education programs on political processes and policy influence into school curricula and university courses
3. Create more inclusive and representative advisory bodies, ensuring diverse voices are heard in policy-making processes

4. Establish government-funded programs specifically designed to support young women in developing leadership skills and entering politics
5. Improve consultation processes with diverse community groups, ensuring they are meaningful and lead to tangible policy outcomes
6. Leverage technology and social media platforms to create innovative engagement opportunities for young women in politics

10.2.2 Theme 2: Government Responsiveness and Policy Preferences

Summary of main points:

1. Young Australian women perceive a lack of genuine care and responsiveness from politicians, feeling that their concerns are often dismissed or overlooked in favour of other priorities.
2. There's a strong emphasis on the need for inclusive and progressive policy changes, particularly in areas of climate action, gender equality, and Indigenous rights, reflecting a holistic view of interconnected social issues.
3. Key policy concerns span climate change, renewable energy, sexual and domestic violence, economic disparities, and digital safety, indicating the multifaceted nature of young women's political interests.
4. Young women are calling for more transparent, accountable, and meaningful consultation processes, expressing frustration with what they perceive as superficial “tick-box” exercises.
5. There's a growing demand for policies that genuinely reflect and support women's experiences, particularly in areas like gender violence, health, and financial equity, with an understanding that these issues require nuanced, long-term solutions.

Representative quotes:

1. “It takes a lot of time and money to truly help young women, which I think is just not the government's priority right now.”
2. “It would be really good to see the government intervene and do something about young men having access to harmful pornographic content that perpetuates violence against women in their lives.”
3. “I think there's a lot of policy change or at least legislative reform that needs to happen. With respect to sexual assault laws and domestic violence.”
4. “Make a treaty with First Nations people after the failure of the voice.”
5. “I know that Australia does have parts of feminism that do integrate within our women's peace and security agenda but more needs to be done.”
6. “I've gone through high school and two university degrees, and I don't think that I've been given any information about how to influence policy or programmes.”
7. “Consultations with different community groups and even protests and even signatures [are important for community engagement].”

Words most mentioned:

Climate change
Feminist perspectives
Quick fixes
Consultation
Indigenous rights
Inadequate action
Unrepresentative governance

Problems most mentioned:

1. Perceived lack of government prioritisation of young women's issues, leading to feelings of neglect and frustration
2. Insufficient legislative reform for sexual assault and domestic violence laws
3. Failure to address the root causes of gender-based violence
4. Inadequate action on climate change and renewable energy
5. Failure to address Indigenous rights and representation comprehensively, particularly after the voice referendum
6. Limited integration of feminist perspectives in policy-making, resulting in policies that don't fully address women's needs
7. Superficial consultation processes that don't lead to meaningful change, eroding trust in political institutions

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Implement comprehensive legislative reform for sexual assault and domestic violence laws, focusing on prevention, survivor support, and systemic change
2. Develop a treaty with First Nations people, ensuring their voices and rights are central to policy-making
3. Increase government intervention in regulating harmful online content, particularly addressing its impact on young people's attitudes and behaviours
4. Prioritise ambitious climate action and renewable energy initiatives, recognising their importance to young women's vision for the future
5. Integrate feminist perspectives more thoroughly in policy-making processes across all areas of governance
6. Establish more meaningful and impactful consultation processes with diverse stakeholders, ensuring feedback directly influences policy outcomes

10.2.3 Theme 3: Impact of Political Climate on Women

Summary of main points:

1. The current political climate, especially conservative environments both domestically and internationally, is causing significant stress and anxiety among young Australian women.
2. There's a growing awareness and concern about global political trends affecting women's rights, particularly reproductive rights, and their potential ripple effects on Australian policies.
3. Young women are increasingly recognising the interconnectedness of national and international political situations, leading to a more globalised perspective on women's rights and gender equality.
4. There's a strong belief that societal attitudes significantly influence policy change, emphasising the need for broader cultural shifts alongside legislative reforms.
5. Young women are calling for more inclusive, evidence-based, and forward-thinking legislation to improve their quality of life, demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between policy and lived experiences.
6. The impact of political decisions on women's mental health and overall well-being is becoming apparent, with many young women reporting increased stress and uncertainty about their futures.

Representative quotes:

1. "It has mostly been the political situation in the world that has caused a little bit of stress to me."
2. "Australia's women's peace and security agenda integrates parts of feminism."
3. "Consultations with different community groups and even protests and even signatures."
4. "When I picture a room full of Australia's politicians, I picture white men in their 50s to 60s who might have daughters and, oh, that's their only real insight into what life is like for a young woman."
5. "I would also wish that the Australian government would sort of fund programs like more for women, especially for young women as well, to step into leadership positions."
6. "I would also wish that the Australian government would sort of fund programs like more for women, especially for young women as well, to step into like leadership positions"

Words most mentioned:

Protest
Reproductive freedoms
Peace and security agenda
Cultural attitudes
Roe v Wade
National Agenda
International events
Women in leadership

Problems most mentioned:

1. Increased stress and anxiety caused by conservative political environments and regressive policies
2. Growing concerns over potential erosion of women's rights, particularly reproductive rights, due to political trends observed abroad
3. Lack of understanding of young women's experiences by older male politicians, leading to crucial perspectives being ignored in policy making
4. Limited opportunities for young women in leadership positions, perpetuating the cycle of underrepresentation
5. Insufficient integration of feminist perspectives in foreign policy and international relations
6. Inadequate response to international trends affecting women's rights, potentially leaving Australia vulnerable to regressive influences

Solutions most mentioned:

1. Increase funding for programs supporting young women in leadership positions across various sectors, including politics
2. Strengthen Australia's women's peace and security agenda with robust feminist perspectives and active global engagement
3. Encourage diverse and representative political leadership through targeted recruitment and support programs
4. Enhance public education on women's rights, gender equality, and the impact of global political trends on local policies
5. Foster safe and inclusive political environments that welcome diverse voices and perspectives
6. Develop proactive policies to protect and advance women's rights keeping up with international trends, positioning Australia as a global leader in gender equality

10.3 Policy Recommendations

Based on these learnings from primary research, YWA recommends the following **targeted policy recommendations** to address the identified issues.

10.3.1 National Young Women’s Agenda

Recommendation:	National Young Women’s Agenda
Objective(s):	To empower young women in Australia by providing comprehensive, accurate, and easily accessible information on federal government resources, services, and opportunities through the establishment of a National Young Women’s Agenda, thereby enhancing their ability to navigate critical life areas such as education, health, legal rights, career development, and personal safety.
Target Area:	Nationwide implementation, targeting young women across Australia, with a specific focus on improving access to vital information related to government policies, educational resources, health services, legal rights, and procedures for seeking help in cases of sexual assault and gender-based violence. The agenda will be updated annually to ensure ongoing relevance and accuracy.
Rationale:	<p>The rationale for the National Young Women’s Agenda is to compile and distribute comprehensive, easy-to-understand information that supports the diverse needs and rights of young women across Australia. By providing clear and accessible information, the agenda aims to ensure that young women have a thorough understanding of the support available to them, particularly in critical areas like sexual assault. Young women’s political agency is, in part, hindered by a lack of awareness of government programs available to them.</p> <p>To maximise accessibility, the guide will be designed to be reader-friendly, with clearly labelled sections and easy-to-navigate formats. It will include text-to-speech compatibility and alternative text for images to accommodate those with disabilities. The use of infographics and bullet points will simplify complex information, making it easier to grasp.</p> <p>The distribution strategy will leverage platforms popular among young women, such as Instagram and TikTok, to promote the YW Agenda. Shareable content, including posts, stories, and short videos, will highlight key sections of the guide. Additionally, coordination with schools, TAFEs, universities, workplaces, libraries, and community centres will ensure broad dissemination.</p> <p>The National YW Agenda aims to improve young women’s perceptions of the federal government, making them feel heard and considered in all aspects of the decision-making process. By providing clear and direct access to support and opportunities, the agenda seeks to foster a sense of inclusion and empowerment among young women in Australia.</p>
Timeline for Implementation:	3 months

Status Quo:

Young women in Australia currently face significant challenges in accessing comprehensive, reliable, and easily understandable information regarding available resources, services, and opportunities. These difficulties span crucial areas such as education, health, legal rights, career development, and personal safety. Particularly concerning is the inadequate guidance available for young women seeking help in cases of sexual assault and gender-based violence. This lack of accessible information contributes to a feeling of neglect and marginalisation among young women, exacerbating their difficulties in navigating these critical life areas.

Recommendation Details:

To address these issues, it is recommended that a National Young Women's Agenda be established and updated annually. This agenda will serve as a comprehensive guide designed to enhance awareness and accessibility of federal government resources, services, and opportunities tailored for young women in Australia. The YW Agenda will provide vital information across multiple life areas, including education, health, legal rights, career development, and safety. It will focus on procedures for seeking help in cases of sexual assault and/or gender-based violence.

The National Young Women's Agenda will include detailed sections on government policies and programs affecting young women, educational resources and scholarship opportunities, health services (including mental and sexual health), career guidance and employment programs, legal rights and assistance (especially concerning discrimination and abuse), and procedures for dealing with and reporting sexual assault. Additionally, it will offer information on consultation and political agency opportunities. All information will be sourced directly from relevant federal government departments to ensure accuracy and relevance.

10.3.2 Mechanism for Young Women to Hear About the Impact of Government Policies and Programs on Women's Lives

Recommendation Details:

YWA's survey data reveals a strong desire among young women to hear about the impact of government policies and programs. Current mechanisms, such as the Australian Gender Equality Council (AGEC) and the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), are deemed inadequate. The AGEC focuses on producing comprehensive reports and engaging in policy advocacy to influence decisions at various government levels. Its resources offer valuable insights and data on gender-related issues, aiming to educate the public and policymakers alike. However, the AGEC's platform is primarily informational, with limited interactive features that could engage users more dynamically, particularly young women who might benefit from a more participatory approach. Similarly, the AHRC works to protect and promote human rights, including gender equality, by conducting research, providing educational resources, and making policy recommendations. Its extensive reports cover various aspects of gender equality and the impact of government policies, offering a broad range of educational materials. Despite these strengths, the AHRC's broad human rights mandate means that gender-specific issues are part of a wider agenda, which can dilute the focus on gender equality. Additionally, the AHRC does not

specifically target young women's perspectives or engagement, limiting its effectiveness in reaching this crucial demographic.

Young women value different methods for learning about the impact of government policies and programs on women's lives based on education levels. Respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher place more importance on learning through educational institutions, social media campaigns, a 'Gender Equality Index' website, a 'Digital Democracy Platform,' and annual reports compared to those without a bachelor's degree. Below, a policy recommendation is presented organised by the ranking from highest to lowest preference among young women surveyed.

1. Social Media Campaigns

Purpose: To leverage social media platforms to inform young women about the impact of government policies and programs on their lives.

Implementation: Utilise popular platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, Facebook, and LinkedIn to maximise reach and engagement. The content strategy will include creating short videos that break down the impact of specific policies into easily digestible segments, featuring policymakers, experts, and young women sharing their experiences. Infographics will summarise data and key points for quick understanding. Interactive elements like polls, surveys, and Q&A sessions will encourage engagement, and hashtag campaigns such as #PolicyImpactAU will promote visibility. Collaborations with influencers will further enhance communication effectiveness.

Advantages: This approach ensures a broad reach, particularly among younger demographics, and allows for real-time engagement, providing immediate feedback and insights into public perception.

Limitations: The volume of content on social media can lead to information overload, making it challenging for important messages to stand out. Ensuring the accuracy of information and combating misinformation requires constant monitoring and proactive engagement.

2. Integration into Educational Institutions

Purpose: To integrate education about the impact of government policies into school, TAFE, and university curriculums.

Implementation: Develop modules explaining the impact of government policies on gender equality, which can be incorporated into subjects such as social studies, politics, and health education. Host annual gender information workshops and organise guest lectures with policymakers, academics, and experts to discuss current policies. Encourage students to analyse and present on policy impacts as part of their academic projects.

Advantages: This method builds foundational knowledge and awareness among students in a structured learning environment.

Limitations: The effectiveness of curriculum integration may vary across institutions, and there may be resistance from some students and educators.

3. Gender Equality Index Website

Purpose: To provide a transparent, interactive platform ranking government programs and policies based on their gender outcomes.

Implementation: Create an interactive dashboard with key indicators such as economic participation, political empowerment, educational attainment, and health to measure policy impacts. Use visualisation tools like graphs, charts, and heatmaps to display data trends. Allow users to create profiles to track specific policies and compare different policies or regions. Publish regularly updated articles, reports, case studies, and use infographics and videos to make complex data accessible.

Advantages: This platform ensures high accessibility, promotes transparency and accountability, and encourages interactive engagement.

Limitations: Regular updates and maintenance are required, and there may be issues for those without internet access.

4. Digital Democracy Platform

Purpose: To enable young women to vote and comment on policy proposals directly.

Implementation: Develop a user-friendly interface presenting current policy proposals for public voting. Create discussion forums for policy debates and host expert panels to provide insights. Provide summaries and detailed analyses of policy proposals.

Advantages: This platform encourages young women to engage in civic activities and provides policymakers with direct feedback.

Limitations: Strong moderation is required to prevent misinformation and ensure constructive discussions. User adoption and sustained engagement may be challenging.

5. Annual Reports

Purpose: To provide detailed analysis of government policies and their impact on women's lives.

Implementation: Conduct thorough research and provide detailed analysis of the impact of government policies on gender equality. Use data visualisation tools to present data clearly and effectively. Distribute digital copies via the Gender Equality Index website and social media, and printed copies in educational institutions, community centres, and libraries. Create visual summaries for easy sharing.

Advantages: Annual reports offer in-depth analysis, a comprehensive overview of policy impacts, and serve as a historical record.

Limitations: Reports are less interactive, potentially limiting engagement, and compiling and distributing them requires significant resources.

Implementing a strategy based on young women's preferences can effectively inform them about the impact of government policies and programs. Based on the data, women's preferences include robust social media campaigns, integration into educational institutions, a comprehensive Gender Equality Index website, a Digital Democracy Platform, and detailed annual reports. Existing resources such as the Australian Gender Equality Council and the Australian Human Rights Commission provide a valuable foundation but need to be refined to better meet the specific needs and preferences of young women.

10.3.3 Ecosystem Map of the Australian Gender Justice Sector

Recommendation:	Ecosystem Map of the Australian Gender Justice Sector
Objective(s):	To enhance the effectiveness, cooperation, and sustainability of the Australian gender sector by creating a centralised ecosystem map that integrates information, resources, and support, thereby reducing fragmentation and improving the delivery of comprehensive assistance to women.
Target Area:	Nationwide implementation, targeting the Australian gender sector, including NGOs, government bodies, research institutions, grassroots movements, and gender justice initiatives. The platform will serve as a central hub for stakeholders and the general public, offering easy access to research, case law, legislation, networking opportunities, and gender-focused events across Australia.
Rationale:	Creating an ecosystem map for the Australian gender sector aims to counter the fragmentation that hinders women's access to resources. Centralising information and resources enhances cooperation, streamlines efforts, and provides reliable support for women. Integrating academic research, government documents, and NGO action plans will create a robust knowledge base for informed decision-making and advocacy. An up-to-date directory of laws and proposed legislation increases allows stakeholders to influence policy developments. The interactive gender justice map offers valuable geographical insights, enabling targeted interventions and resource allocation, per YWA's endorsement of more customised policy responses.
Timeline for Implementation:	6 months

Status Quo:

The Australian gender sector currently operates in a fragmented manner, with numerous organisations and initiatives working independently. This decentralisation leads to duplicated efforts, inefficiencies, and challenges in providing women with reliable and comprehensive support. There is a need for a cohesive platform that centralises information, resources, and support, fostering cooperation and enhancing the sector's sustainability.

Recommendation Details:

This recommendation advocates for the creation of an ecosystem map for the Australian gender sector. This platform will centralise information, resources, and support, improving cooperation, reducing duplicated efforts, and providing reliable assistance to women. It aims to enhance the sustainability of the sector by fostering a more integrated approach.

The ecosystem map will encompass the following components:

Research & Publications: The platform will incorporate academic papers and publications focused on gender issues, challenges, and recommendations. It will integrate official government documents, enacted laws, and guidelines relating to gender in Australia. Additionally, it will feature research, case studies, and action plans from NGOs and grassroots movements, providing a comprehensive repository of knowledge and insights.

Case Law & Legislation: An up-to-date directory of national and regional laws pertaining to gender rights, equality, and related issues will be maintained. The platform will showcase publicly available drafts or proposed laws, enabling users to engage, discuss, and provide feedback on legislative developments.

Interactive Gender Justice Map: The map will offer geographical insights into gender justice metrics across different regions or territories of Australia. It will include data on violence, wage gaps, representation in leadership roles, and more. The map will highlight regional gender justice initiatives, workshops, and programs, helping users locate resources and support in their vicinity.

Networking & Collaboration Hub: A stakeholder directory will list NGOs, government bodies, research institutions, and grassroots movements, along with their initiatives and contact information. The platform will feature gender experts, activists, and policymakers, facilitating direct engagement and collaboration.

Event & Campaign Calendar: A comprehensive calendar will provide information on upcoming gender-focused events, training sessions, webinars, and conferences. It will also highlight ongoing and upcoming gender justice campaigns, enabling users to participate, volunteer, or support these initiatives.

10.3.4 Youth Engagement Platform for Policy Feedback

Recommendation:	Youth Engagement Platform for Policy Feedback
Objective(s):	To enhance the participation and influence of young people in Australia's policy development processes by creating a user-friendly digital platform that facilitates easy access to draft policies, enables meaningful feedback, and provides monetary compensation for contributions.
Target Area:	Nationwide implementation, targeting young people across Australia, with a focus on increasing accessibility, inclusivity, and transparency in policy development. The platform will serve as a central hub for youth engagement, allowing them to contribute to various aspects of policy-making, including

	advertising campaigns and curricular content, while ensuring their input is valued and acknowledged.
Rationale:	<p>The proposed digital platform addresses the current gaps in youth engagement by creating an accessible and responsive environment. By centralising access to draft policies, advertising campaigns, and curricular content, the platform will streamline the engagement process and make it easier for young people to contribute their insights.</p> <p>Monetary compensation will acknowledge the value of their time and effort, encouraging broader participation from diverse backgrounds. This inclusivity is essential for ensuring that policies are reflective of the varied experiences and needs of young Australians.</p> <p>The feedback and transparency mechanism will build trust and demonstrate that youth contributions are not only heard but also acted upon. Highlighting success stories where youth input has led to policy changes will further motivate participation and underscore the platform's impact.</p> <p>Training and support resources will empower young people to engage more effectively, enhancing the quality of their contributions. Ensuring privacy and safety will create a secure environment, encouraging open and honest participation.</p> <p>Implementation steps include developing the platform in collaboration with tech developers and incorporating feedback from pilot testing with a diverse group of young Australians. Partnerships with educational institutions, youth organisations, and community groups will promote the platform, while collaboration with local governments and businesses will provide financial support and enhance its reach. Promotion and outreach efforts will utilise social media, online campaigns, and community events to raise awareness, targeting underrepresented groups to ensure broad participation.</p>
Timeline for Implementation:	12 months

Status Quo:

Young people in Australia currently have limited opportunities to engage meaningfully with policy development processes. Existing platforms for youth participation are often inaccessible, difficult to navigate, and do not provide adequate feedback mechanisms. Additionally, there is a lack of financial incentives to encourage broad and inclusive participation. Cumulatively, the contributions of young people are frequently undervalued and overlooked.

Recommendation Details:

This recommendation proposes the creation of a user-friendly digital platform. This platform will enable young people to access draft policy ideas, advertising campaigns, and curricular content, provide

feedback, and receive monetary compensation for their participation. The goal is to ensure that their contributions are valued, considered, and acknowledged transparently.

Key features of the platform include:

User-Friendly Interface: A simple and intuitive design will facilitate easy navigation and accessibility on multiple devices, including smartphones, tablets, and computers.

Diverse Participation Channels: Users can engage through quick surveys and polls or participate in detailed discussions and debates on forums and discussion boards.

Monetary Compensation: Participants will receive stipends or vouchers for their contributions, promoting inclusivity and valuing their time and effort. Payment structures will be transparent, with clear guidelines on how participation is rewarded.

Feedback and Transparency Mechanism: After each consultation, participants will receive a detailed summary of how their feedback was used. A dedicated section will showcase success stories and examples where youth input has led to concrete policy changes.

Training and Support: The platform will provide tips on effectively articulating ideas and understanding policy implications. A support team with a 48-hour response time will assist with technical issues and provide guidance on participating in consultations.

Privacy and Safety: Robust measures will protect participants' personal data. Guidelines and moderation will ensure respectful and constructive interactions.

Relevant Case Studies

Youth Policy Toolbox (UNESCAP): A toolkit for policymakers to engage youth effectively, providing resources for creating youth-friendly policies and reducing policy risks. Deployed across various regions in Asia between 2014-2016, it has led to more effective and sustainable policies aligned with the real challenges faced by youth.

VSO's Youth Platforms in Machakos, Kenya: It is a youth-led initiative that provides a safe space for youth voices, influence, and leadership. Established in 2017 and formalised in 2018, it has led to significant policy changes, improved access to technical training and financial products, increased youth representation in government processes, and enhanced youth entrepreneurship opportunities.

Youth Collaboratory's Virtual Engagement: Developed in response to the need for virtual engagement, this initiative utilises social media, virtual meetings, and online safety tools to ensure inclusive and secure participation. It has enhanced the engagement of young people, ensuring their safety and promoting active participation in policy discussions.

SUMMARY SOLUTIONS

Table 23: Summary of Policy Recommendations

Clause No.	Policy Recommendation	Overview of Recommendation
AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY		
2.3.1	Incentive-Based Innovation Platform for Gender Justice	Create an innovative platform aimed at driving progress in gender equality while generating economic benefits.
2.3.2	Enhancing the AANA Code of Ethics Regarding Gender Representation in Advertising	Enhance the AANA Code to more effectively align with contemporary societal expectations and promote gender sensitive portrayals in advertising.
2.3.3	Enhancing the AANA Children’s Advertising Code Regarding Gender Representation in Advertising	Enhance the AANA Code to better address concerns about gender stereotypes in children’s advertising.
2.3.4	Adding Gender Stereotype Assessment to Screen Australia’s Evaluation	Add an assessment for gender stereotyping to Screen Australia’s Gender Matters initiative to ensure the focus is not just on the number of women but also on how they are portrayed.
2.3.5	Social Media Regulation for Online Safety and Gender Justice in Australia	Enact legislation to increase regulation of social media platforms; establish a regulatory body to enforce content moderation practices.
FAMILY/ FRIENDS		
3.3.1	Life Credit System	Allow credit accumulation through work, volunteering, and caregiving. The accumulated credit can be used for support during various life stages and transitions, such as studies or

		career interruptions due to childbirth.
3.3.2	Parents' Guidebook	The Guidebook aims to equip parents with the necessary tools and knowledge to support young women in the complex challenges they face.
EDUCATION		
4.4.1	Sliding Scale Tuition Policy for Disadvantaged Students	Implement a sliding scale tuition policy where university tuition fees are adjusted based on parental income and the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA).
4.4.2	Online Education Support Scheme for Primary School Students	Provide targeted support to low-income primary school students with poor NAPLAN results.
4.4.3	Gendered Deradicalisation	Introduce a new course for high school students that challenges traditional narratives and offers a nuanced understanding of human societies and gender roles, encouraging critical reflection on gender stereotypes.
4.4.4	Gender De-biasing Australian Textbooks	Remove gender bias in Australian textbooks to foster strong self-esteem and encourage young girls to internalise the belief that they can achieve anything.

4.4.5	Educational Interventions to Mitigate GBV Perpetration & Exposure	Identify suitable educational interventions based on correlations with GBV perpetration and exposure derived from YWA's original time progression analysis.
SAFETY/RELATIONSHIPS/SEX/GBV		
5.4.1.1	Specific inclusions in Consent and Respectful Relationships Education (CRRE)	Include modules namely Preventing IPV Onset, Cognitive Dissonance and Value Reassessment Workshops, Teaching Emotional Regulation to Young Men to Prevent IPV, Incorporating Grey Zones in GBV and Sexual Assertiveness Training to improve effectiveness of CRRE.
5.4.1.2	Targeted Social Media Campaign to Challenge Gender Equality Misconceptions Among At-Risk Young Men	Create a strategic social media campaign to address misconceptions about gender equality among at-risk young men.
5.4.1.3	Develop a National Agenda for Research and Action → Establish a Central Funding Register → Engage Philanthropic Organisations → Standardised Monitoring and Evaluation	Develop a national agenda for research focused on primary prevention and early intervention; involve philanthropic organisations for funding, and monitor and evaluate the research program.
5.4.1.4	Modern Relationships Essay Series: Curriculum Integration	Launch a modern relationships essay series to increase young people's awareness of changing gender roles and dynamics in contemporary relationships.
5.4.1.5	NSW MBCP Funding and Trial program	Increase funding for Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs) and start a two year trial based on the successful Communicare Breathing

		Space program in Western Australia.
5.4.1.6	Designing Your Life Courses	Integrate ‘Designing Your Life’ courses into education to counteract precarious masculinity and status anxiety to prevent IPV.
5.4.1.7	Life Transition Support for Young Women	Fund YWA to provide life transition support to young women in Australia.
5.4.1.8	Implementing Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) Test in Educational and Community Settings	Implement voluntary ASI testing to identify sexist perceptions, attitudes and opinions - allowing for targeted interventions before escalation to questionable and/or violent behaviours.
SELF ESTEEM		
6.3.1	Women’s Book & TikTok Series	Launch Women’s Book & Tik Tok series to provide a viable, practical counterculture that supports the constructive shaping of young women's self-esteem away from influencers and models.
6.3.2	Embedding Life Philosophy and Humanist Philosophy in Education Systems	Provide a supportive educational framework that embeds life philosophy and humanist philosophy into the curriculum and provides a robust foundation to young women for developing high self-esteem.
6.3.3	Regulating Influencer Content to Protect Young Women and Girls	Create a safer online environment for young women and children using various measures like content regulation and filtering, content warnings etc.
HEALTH		

7.3.1	Health Interventions to Mitigate GBV Perpetration and Exposure	Implement health interventions for young men and women to mitigate GBV perpetration and exposure. This is based on YWA's original time progression analysis of GBV perpetration and exposure which reveals critical intersections between health and increased risk/likelihood through several key correlations. The analysis helps identify precise intervention points and methods to mitigate these risks effectively.
7.3.2	Value-Based Payment Models for Gender-Equitable Care	Shift towards value-based medical care for improved gender-sensitive care, rather than the fee-for-service model currently in practice in Australia.
7.3.3	Expand Access to Women's Health Services Through Telehealth and Mobile Health Technologies	Expand access to women's health services through telehealth and mobile health technologies to improve access for people in remote / regional communities and for increased privacy.
7.3.4	Comprehensive Revision of Medical Curriculum, Enhanced Professional Assessments, and Mandatory Refresher Courses for Practising Professionals to Bridge Knowledge Gaps	Ensure medical professionals are up-to-date with the gendered issues women face through curriculum revisions, enhanced professional assessments and mandatory refresher courses.
7.3.5	Mandate Gender-Disaggregated Data Collection	Mandate data collection in clinical and medical trials based on sex and gender for improved analysis of gender specific effects of treatments.

7.3.6	Research for Non-Hormonal Contraception	Advance research and development in non-hormonal alternatives.
CAREER		
8.3.1	Development of an Australian Economic Opportunities Platform (EOP) for Young Women	Develop an EOP to enhance employment prospects and economic empowerment for young women across Australia.
8.3.2	Child Care Access Initiative	Implement reforms designed to reduce the financial and logistical burdens on families and increase the child care workforce.
8.3.3	Parental Leave Incentives & Return-to-Work Support	Provide support through paid parental leave and flexibility to encourage fathers' sharing the responsibility for children.
8.3.4	Augmenting Existing Women in STEM Scholarships	Enhance the appeal of STEM scholarships for young women by placing explicit emphasis on social impact.
8.3.5	Female-Focused Career Enhancement for HR Staff	Capacity building of HR staff through targeted training, with a focus on specific challenges women face in the workplace.
8.3.6	Gender-Sensitive Career Tool	Develop and publish an online self-assessment tool for university and TAFE students.
8.3.7	Workplace Interventions to Mitigate GBV Perpetration & Exposure	Implement workplace interventions based on YWA's original time progression analysis of GBV perpetration and exposure.
FINANCIAL SECURITY		
9.3.1	Financial Education in Australian Curriculum	Integrate Financial Literacy into the National Curriculum as a compulsory subject.

9.3.2	Universal Basic Income (UBI) for Victim-Survivors of DFSV	Implement a Targeted UBI Pilot Program for Victim-Survivors of DFSV to alleviate financial stress that impedes their ability to leave, avoid or recover from abusive situations.
9.3.3	Trust Fund for Low-Income Children	Establish a Government Trust Fund for Low-Income Children to end cycles of poverty that limit their potential for socio-economic mobility.
9.3.4	Employer Investment in Women's Training and Development	Enable employer investment to reduce barriers women continue to face in accessing essential training opportunities, which hampers their professional development and growth.
POLITICAL AGENCY		
10.3.1	National Young Women's Agenda	Create a National Young Women's Agenda that provides vital information across multiple life areas, including education, health, legal rights, career development, and safety including seeking help in cases of sexual assault and/or gender-based violence.
10.3.2	Mechanism for Young Women to Hear About the Impact of Government Policies and Programs on Women's Lives	Implement mechanisms to effectively inform young women about the impact of government policies and programs.
10.3.3	Ecosystem Map of the Australian Gender Justice Sector	Create an ecosystem map for the Australian gender sector that provides centralised information, resources, and support thus improving cooperation, reducing duplicated efforts, and

		providing reliable assistance to women.
10.3.4	Youth Engagement Platform for Policy Feedback	Launch an inclusive, user-friendly digital platform that enables young people to access draft policy ideas, advertise campaigns, and curricular content, provide feedback, and receive monetary compensation for their participation.



FUTURE OF GENDER JUSTICE

Feminist movements have marked important achievements, but a closer examination reveals a persistent gap between mainstream acceptance and actual progress. The increased visibility of feminist ideals often obscures deeper, unresolved inequalities that continue to affect women globally. The pursuit of genuine gender equality requires renewed strategies and a focused effort to dismantle the systemic barriers that remain, explored below.

11.1 The Illusion of Progress

Feminist activism has reshaped societal norms over the past century.

The acquisition of voting rights (1902 for women; 1962 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women at the national level), advancement of workplace protections, and expansion of reproductive freedoms stand as testaments to the movement's impact. These hard-won victories have fundamentally altered the legal and social landscape for women in many parts of the world. Recent years have witnessed a surge in feminist discourse, with 61% of women now identifying as feminists, up from 23% in 2013. This cultural shift has permeated popular media, with high-profile figures openly embracing feminist ideals, leading to increased visibility and mainstream acceptance of feminist concepts.

However, this veneer of progress obscures a more complex reality. The core aspirations of feminism—economic parity, bodily autonomy, and equal political representation—remain largely unfulfilled. The increased visibility of feminist ideals in popular culture has not necessarily translated into substantive policy changes and shifts in deep-rooted societal structures. This disconnect between cultural acceptance and material change represents a significant challenge for the feminist movement.

Gender mainstreaming efforts, despite their widespread adoption, have fallen short of their transformative potential. The European Commission's implementation of gender mainstreaming, for instance, has relied heavily on “soft” incentives like persuasion, rather than mandates and tangible rewards. This approach has resulted in inconsistent and often superficial changes in this region, failing to address the root causes of gender inequality. The lack of hard incentives and accountability measures has allowed institutions to pay lip service to gender equality without implementing meaningful reforms.

11.2 Systemic Challenges

Economic Disparities: The glacial pace of closing the gender pay gap exemplifies the persistence of economic inequality. From 1970 to 2018, the ratio of women's to men's pay in the United States increased from 0.61 to 0.83, with progress significantly decelerating post-1990. This stagnation is compounded by occupational segregation, where women remain underrepresented in high-paying STEM fields and overrepresented in lower-paying care work. The reasons for this persistent gap are multifaceted, including discrimination, differences in education and career choices, and the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work that falls on women.

Moreover, the economic challenges faced by women extend beyond wage disparities. Women are more likely to work in part-time or informal sector jobs, which often lack benefits and job security. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these disparities, with women disproportionately affected by job losses and increased caregiving responsibilities. The long-term economic impacts of these trends could reverse decades of progress in women's economic empowerment.

Violence Against Women: The pervasiveness of gender-based violence remains a global epidemic. The World Health Organisation estimates that 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. This statistic underscores the endemic nature of violence against women, which transcends cultural, economic, and geographic boundaries. The persistence of such violence reflects deeply ingrained societal norms and power structures that continue to devalue and subjugate women.

The #MeToo movement (2017),³⁰³ while raising awareness about sexual harassment and assault, has faced significant backlash. This pushback has manifested in various forms, including the release of high-profile sexual abuse felons and increased harassment of survivors who speak out. The movement has exposed the depth of sexual violence in various industries and social spheres. It has revealed the resistance to change and the challenges of translating awareness into concrete action and policy reform.

Political Underrepresentation: Despite incremental increases in women's political participation, parity remains elusive. As of 2021, women hold only 25.5% of national parliamentary seats globally, with significant regional variations. This underrepresentation extends to corporate leadership, where women occupy merely 8.1% of Fortune 500 CEO positions. The persistent lack of women in decision-making roles has far-reaching consequences, affecting policy priorities, resource allocation, and societal norms.

The barriers to women's political participation are multifaceted. They include structural obstacles such as political systems favouring incumbent (often male) candidates, societal expectations about women's roles, and the challenges of balancing political careers with family responsibilities. Additionally, women in politics often face disproportionate scrutiny, online harassment, and gender-based discrimination, which can deter participation and hinder career advancement.

Entrenched Cultural Attitudes: Deep-rooted gender norms continue to constrain women's lives across various cultures. These norms manifest in myriad ways, from expectations about women's roles in the family to biases in educational and professional settings. In academia, for example, a study by García-Gonsáles et al. found that men and women have divergent perceptions of gender inequality in research institutions, with this perception gap consistent across various positions and institutions. This disparity in perception itself becomes a barrier to addressing gender inequality, as it hinders recognition of the problem and mobilisation for change.

Cultural attitudes also play a significant role in perpetuating harmful practices such as child marriage, female genital mutilation, and honour killings in some parts of the world. These practices, deeply embedded in cultural and religious traditions, pose significant challenges to the global feminist movement, requiring context specific approaches that balance respect for cultural values with the protection of women's fundamental rights.

Intersectionality Gaps: The movement has struggled to fully address the compounded challenges faced by women at the intersection of multiple marginalised identities. Black women in the United States, for instance, earn only 63 cents for every dollar earned by white, non-Hispanic men, highlighting the interplay of gender and racial discrimination. This example underscores the inadequacy of approaches that treat women as a monolithic group, failing to account for the diverse experiences shaped by race, class, sexuality, disability, and other factors.

The concept of intersectionality, introduced by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, has gained prominence in feminist discourse, but its full integration into feminist practice remains a challenge. Many mainstream feminist initiatives continue to prioritise the experiences of white, middle-class, cisgender women, marginalising the voices and needs of women from diverse backgrounds. This failure to fully embrace

³⁰³The phrase was first used in 2006 by Tarana Burke in her empowerment-focused social movement and public awareness campaign.

intersectionality not only perpetuates inequalities within the feminist movement but also limits its effectiveness in addressing the complex realities of gender oppression in diverse global contexts.

11.3 Backlash

As feminism has gained cultural traction, the number and visibility of its detractors have also increased.. This backlash manifests in various forms, each presenting unique challenges to the feminist movement:

Digital Misogyny: The rise of online 'manosphere' communities³⁰⁴ has led to the proliferation of anti-feminist ideologies. These spaces often appropriate progressive language to argue against feminist goals, creating a veneer of legitimacy for misogynistic views. The anonymity and reach provided by digital platforms have amplified these voices, making them particularly challenging to counter. The spread of misinformation and hate speech targeting feminists and women in general has created a hostile online environment, deterring participation and silencing voices.

The digital backlash extends beyond explicitly anti-feminist spaces. Social media algorithms often amplify polarising content, creating echo chambers that reinforce anti-feminist sentiments. This digital landscape presents a significant challenge for feminist organisers, who must navigate these hostile spaces while leveraging digital tools for their own advocacy and community-building efforts.

Political Polarisation: A growing ideological chasm between young women and men has emerged. In the United States, for example, young women are increasingly likely to identify as liberal, while young men are more likely to embrace conservative ideologies. This gender gap in political affiliation has implications for policy-making, electoral outcomes, and social cohesion. The divergence in political views can be attributed to various factors, including differing experiences of gender discrimination, exposure to feminist ideas, and the influence of online communities.

The polarisation extends beyond party affiliation to attitudes about gender roles and equality. Some men report feeling threatened by changing gender norms and perceive efforts towards gender equality as coming at their expense. This perception fuels resistance to feminist initiatives and can lead to the embrace of reactionary ideologies. Bridging this ideological divide presents a challenge for the feminist movement, requiring strategies that can engage across political and ideological boundaries.

Policy Rollbacks: Recent years have seen unprecedented restrictions on women's healthcare in various regions. The 2022 Dobbs decision in the United States, overturning federal abortion protections, exemplifies this regressive trend. This decision not only restricts women's reproductive rights but also sets a precedent for further erosion of gender equality protections. Similar rollbacks have been observed in other countries, often framed within nationalist or religious narratives that prioritise traditional gender roles.

³⁰⁴ The Guardian. (2024). *We unleashed Facebook and Instagram's algorithms on blank accounts. They served up sexism and misogyny.* <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/article/2024/jul/21/we-unleashed-facebook-and-instagram-algorithms-on-blank-accounts-they-served-up-sexism-and-misogyny>

These policy reversals highlight the fragility of progress in women's rights and the need for vigilance and advocacy. They underscore the importance of enshrining gender equality protections in constitutional and international law frameworks to guard against political fluctuations.

Covert Discrimination: As overt discrimination becomes less socially acceptable, subtle forms of gender bias persist. In the workplace, this can manifest as microaggressions, exclusion from informal networks and biased performance evaluations. These covert forms of discrimination are more challenging to identify and address than overt sexism, requiring nuanced interventions.

The persistence of covert discrimination highlights the limitations of legal and policy approaches alone in achieving gender equality. It points to the need for comprehensive strategies that address unconscious biases, organisational cultures, and societal norms that perpetuate gender inequality in more subtle ways.

11.4 Contemporary Feminist Challenges

Conceptual Ambiguity: The multiplicity of feminist perspectives has led to fragmentation and confusion about the movement's core objectives. This lack of cohesion hampers effective advocacy and policy implementation. While diversity of thought can be a strength, it can also lead to internal conflicts and difficulty in presenting a unified front to policymakers and the public.

The debates within feminism—such as those between liberal and radical feminists, or between those who prioritise gender identity and those who emphasise biological sex—have at times become divisive, detracting from the movement's broader goals. Navigating these internal tensions while maintaining a cohesive movement presents an ongoing challenge for feminist organisers and theorists.

Institutional Resistance: Gender mainstreaming efforts face structural barriers within organisations. Sarikakis and Nguyen's study on EU media policy framework demonstrates how specific institutional dynamics and entrenched interests can impede genuine change. This resistance can take various forms, from bureaucratic inertia to active opposition from those who benefit from existing power structures.

The challenges of institutional change are particularly evident in traditionally male-dominated fields such as politics, finance, and technology. Even when gender equality policies are formally adopted, their implementation often falls short due to a lack of resources, accountability measures and genuine commitment from leadership. Overcoming this institutional resistance requires sustained effort, strategic alliance-building, and innovative approaches to organisational change.

Neoliberal Co-optation: Critics argue that mainstream feminism has been subsumed by neoliberal ideologies, focusing on individual empowerment at the expense of addressing systemic inequalities. This “lean-in” feminism often fails to challenge the underlying structures perpetuating gender disparities. The emphasis on individual success stories and market-based solutions can obscure the need for collective action and structural change.

The co-optation of feminist language by corporations and political entities for branding or superficial policy initiatives ('femvertising' or 'pink-washing') further complicates this issue. While increased visibility for feminist ideas can be positive, the dilution of feminist messages and the commodification of empowerment pose challenges to maintaining the movement's transformative potential.

Intergenerational Tensions: Differing priorities and tactical approaches between older and younger feminists have led to internal discord. While older generations may focus on institutional change, younger activists tend to prioritise intersectionality and systemic overhaul. These generational differences reflect changing societal contexts and evolving understandings of gender and equality.

The challenge lies in bridging these generational divides to create a movement that honours its historical legacy while adapting to contemporary realities. Facilitating intergenerational dialogue and collaboration is crucial for ensuring the continuity and evolution of feminist thought and practice.

Data Deficits: The lack of comprehensive, gender-disaggregated data hinders effective policy-making and progress evaluation. This deficit is particularly acute in areas such as unpaid care work and gender-based violence. Without accurate and detailed data, it becomes difficult to fully understand the scope of gender inequality, design targeted interventions, and measure the impact of policies and programs.

The data gap extends beyond simply collecting sex-disaggregated statistics. It also involves understanding the gendered implications of seemingly neutral data and policies. Addressing this challenge requires investment in data collection infrastructure, training in gender-sensitive research methodologies, and integration of gender analysis in policy development and evaluation.

11.5 Recalibrating Feminist Activism

To address these multifaceted challenges, the feminist movement must evolve strategically, adopting approaches that are both responsive to current realities and forward-looking in their vision:

Intersectional Praxis: Moving beyond mere acknowledgment of intersectionality to its practical application in policy and advocacy is crucial. This involves centring the voices and experiences of marginalised women in decision-making processes and ensuring that policies address the compounded effects of multiple forms of discrimination. Practical steps include:

- Implementing participatory research methodologies that prioritise the perspectives of women from diverse backgrounds in policy development.
- Creating leadership pipelines and mentorship programs specifically designed to elevate women from underrepresented groups within feminist organisations and broader institutions.
- Developing policy frameworks that explicitly address the intersections of gender with other forms of identity and oppression, such as race, class, disability, and sexuality.
- Fostering coalitions between feminist groups and other social justice movements to address interconnected systems of oppression.

Systemic Analysis: Developing a more nuanced understanding of how gender inequality is embedded in economic, political, and social systems is essential for effective change. This could involve:

- Collaborating with economists to analyse the gendered impacts of macroeconomic policies, such as austerity measures or trade agreements, and developing alternative models that prioritise gender equality.
- Partnering with urban planners to create gender-responsive city designs in urban development projects that consider women's safety, mobility, and access to resources.

- Engaging with legal scholars to identify and address gender biases in legislative and judicial systems, working towards comprehensive legal reforms that go beyond surface-level equality.
- Developing interdisciplinary research initiatives that explore the interconnections between gender inequality and other global challenges, such as climate change, technological disruption, and democratic backsliding.

Male Allyship: Cultivating meaningful male engagement through education and accountability is crucial for sustainable change. Programs like UN Women's HeForShe campaign (founded 2014) provide a model for involving men in gender equality efforts without centering their experiences. Strategies for effective male allyship can include:

- Developing educational programs for boys and men that challenge toxic masculinity and promote gender-equitable attitudes from an early age.
- Creating accountability frameworks within organisations that incentivise men to actively support and promote gender equality initiatives.
- Highlighting and amplifying the voices of male allies who are doing substantive work in gender equality, providing role models for other men to emulate.
- Engaging men in conversations about the benefits of gender equality for all genders, framing it as a collective gain rather than a zero-sum game.

Policy Reform: Advocating for concrete, measurable policy changes is essential for translating feminist ideals into tangible improvements in women's lives. Key policy priorities might include:

- Implementing pay transparency legislation to address wage gaps, requiring companies to regularly audit and disclose gender pay disparities.
- Establishing comprehensive, consent-focused sexual education curricula in schools to promote healthy relationships and reduce gender-based violence.
- Instituting gender-responsive budgeting at national and local levels to ensure that public resources are allocated in ways that promote gender equality.
- Expanding affordable, high-quality child care options to support working parents, recognising child care as a public good essential for gender equality in the workforce.
- Reforming political systems to increase women's representation, such as implementing gender quotas or providing campaign finance support for women candidates.

Cultural Transformation: Challenging harmful gender norms through targeted interventions is crucial for long-term change. This could include:

- Partnering with media organisations to increase diverse representation and challenge stereotypical portrayals of gender in entertainment and news media.
- Developing school programs that deconstruct gender stereotypes from an early age, promoting critical thinking about gender roles and expectations.
- Collaborating with religious and community leaders to reinterpret cultural traditions in ways that support gender equality while respecting cultural heritage.
- Launching public awareness campaigns that highlight the contributions of women in various fields, challenging stereotypes about women's capabilities and roles.

Data-Driven Advocacy: Investing in robust data collection and analysis to inform policy and measure progress is essential for evidence-based activism. This includes supporting initiatives like Data2X, which works to close gender data gaps in critical areas. Specific strategies can include:

- Advocating for the inclusion of gender-specific indicators in national statistical systems and international development frameworks.
- Developing innovative methodologies for collecting data on hard-to-measure aspects of gender inequality, such as time use in unpaid care work or experiences of online harassment.
- Creating open-access platforms for sharing gender-disaggregated data and analysis, facilitating collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and activists.
- Training feminist activists in data literacy and analysis, empowering them to use data effectively in their advocacy efforts.

Transnational Solidarity: Fostering cross-border feminist alliances while respecting local contexts is crucial in an increasingly interconnected world. The success of movements like Ni Una Menos in Latin America demonstrates the power of building and leveraging transnational connections.

11.6 Conclusion

The feminist movement is at a crucial juncture where past achievements, while significant, cannot counter the persistent and evolving challenges women face. The illusion of progress, marked by cultural visibility, has not translated into the deep structural changes needed for gender equality. Economic disparities, gender-based violence, political underrepresentation, and entrenched cultural attitudes continue to hinder women's full participation in society. Moreover, the rise of digital misogyny, political polarisation, and covert discrimination underscore the resilience of patriarchal systems.

Feminism must recalibrate, focusing on intersectional praxis, systemic analysis, and policy reforms, alongside a coordinated sense of—what do we want, for whom do we want it, and how will we achieve it.



NEXT STEPS FOR GOVERNMENT

As priority recommendations, it is recommended the government pursue the following. These are critical imperatives designed to transform research into actionable, real-world interventions, enhance the effectiveness of support systems, and ensure that policy decisions are informed by the latest, gender-specific data. Each measure is crafted to achieve immediate, measurable impact while also establishing a robust foundation for enduring, systemic change.

1. The YWA research highlights a clear link between early exposure to sexism and gender discrimination in various social settings and the development of GBV-related behaviours in young men, as well as increased vulnerability to GBV among young women. These findings suggest that targeted interventions at key life stages can play a crucial role in preventing the progression of these issues. Accordingly, it is suggested that the government:

- Form a 3–4-person task force comprising YWA representatives and government policymakers focused on directly translating the insights from the report into actionable interventions. This task force will prioritise the creation of targeted interventions and policy recommendations that address the key developmental stages identified. The process will involve closely examining the report’s findings and designing interventions that are specific, measurable, and applicable to the identified risk factors and life stages. Drafted interventions should have clear objectives, outlining the expected outcomes and the necessary resources for implementation. Priority recommendations should be developed to guide policymakers on the most urgent areas for intervention, ensuring a targeted approach that addresses the root causes of GBV.
 - Engage with academic institutions and research bodies to conduct further studies on gendered disadvantage and its link to GBV. This additional research will provide a deeper understanding of the nuances of how these disadvantages develop and persist, allowing for more refined and targeted intervention strategies. The findings should be integrated into the existing interventions to ensure they remain relevant and effective.
 - Allocate funding for development, implementation, and ongoing evaluation of these interventions. The budget should include provisions for training educators, community leaders, and other key stakeholders to ensure they are equipped to implement these interventions effectively across different regions. This step will also involve setting up the necessary infrastructure to support the interventions, including monitoring systems and feedback mechanisms, with evaluation being crucial.
2. Publish an annual National Young Women’s Agenda. This agenda will serve as a comprehensive document outlining all government policies and services relevant to young women, providing an overview of the latest policy developments and changes in key indicators related to young women's well-being. By tracking these indicators annually, the agenda will offer a clear picture of progress and areas needing further attention, ensuring that young women's issues remain a priority in national policy discussions.
 3. Include a young women-specific section in the ‘regular survey to hear directly from women about their lives, concerns, and priorities,’ leveraging the learnings from YWA’s National Gender Survey. This section should be designed to capture the unique challenges and priorities of young women, providing data that can inform targeted policy development. The inclusion of such a section will ensure that the voices and experiences of young women are accurately reflected in national statistics, leading to more effective and responsive policies.
 4. Investigate and fund the Young Women’s Alliance (YWA) as the proposed life transition support organisation for young women ages 18-28. This organisation would be introduced in high schools to provide comprehensive support (harm prevention workshops, educational opportunity, employment access, nation-wide community, and a ‘one-stop-shop’ for referral to other services) to young women as they navigate critical life transitions wherein gender-based disadvantage is heightened. The impact of this support should be measured through robust evaluation mechanisms, ensuring that the organisation effectively addresses the needs of young women during these pivotal years.

5. Create an ecosystem map of the Australian Gender Justice Sector. This map will serve not only as a tool for policymakers and stakeholders to coordinate efforts but also as a resource for young women to access services and support in a streamlined and coordinated manner. The map will include all relevant organisations, initiatives, and resources, providing a clear overview of the sector. It will be regularly updated to ensure that it reflects the current landscape.
6. Mandate gender-disaggregated data collection. This data is crucial for understanding the gender-specific impacts of health interventions and ensuring that both men and women benefit equally from medical research and healthcare advancements.
7. Expand access to women's health services through telehealth and mobile health technologies. This expansion is vital for ensuring that all women, regardless of geography, have access to necessary healthcare. The government should prioritise the deployment of telehealth and mobile technologies for essential health services, ensuring that these services are accessible to the most vulnerable populations. The expansion should be supported by the necessary infrastructure and training for healthcare providers to deliver high-quality care through these platforms.
8. Embed financial education in the Australian Curriculum. The government should integrate financial education into the Australian Curriculum, with a particular emphasis on equipping young women with the skills necessary for financial independence. This education is essential for reducing economic disparities and preparing young women for financial challenges in adulthood. The curriculum will cover essential topics such as budgeting, saving, investing, and understanding credit, and will be designed to address the specific barriers women face in achieving financial security. This aims to prevent the accumulated disadvantage of poor financial literacy.
9. Augment Existing Women in STEM Scholarships. The government should enhance existing scholarships for women in STEM fields by emphasising the ability, through STEM, to contribute to society. This should include pathways to interdisciplinary research and addressing pressing global health and humanitarian concerns. By focusing on evidence-based strategies, the government can ensure that these scholarships lead to meaningful increases in female participation in STEM, addressing the root causes of underrepresentation.
10. Commission a Gender Sensitive Career Tool. This tool will provide tailored guidance, helping young women make informed decisions about their career paths. It will consider gender-specific barriers and offer strategies to overcome them. The effectiveness of the tool will be evaluated based on its impact on career choices and outcomes for young women.
11. Embed Gendered Deradicalisation in the Australian Curriculum. This content will provide a practical, viable counterculture to dominance and subjugation, and proffer that societies can advance in the absence of oppressive hierarchies; in other words, cooperative affluence is an alternative path forward. The curriculum will include specific lessons designed to challenge and dismantle gender stereotypes, promoting a culture of equality and respect.

12. Create a National Agenda for Research & Action → Establish a Central Funding Register → Engage Philanthropic Organisations → Standardised Monitoring and Evaluation. The agenda will outline key research priorities and action steps, establishing a Central Funding Register to streamline funding efforts and ensure resources are allocated effectively. Engaging philanthropic organisations will be crucial for securing diverse funding sources, while standardised monitoring and evaluation processes will ensure that funded initiatives are impactful and achieve measurable results. By aligning research and action under a centralised agenda, the government can enhance the effectiveness of gender justice efforts nationwide and over time, develop a best practice repository of what works, when and for whom.

13. Embed Designing Your Life Courses in the Australian Curriculum. These courses will serve as a proactive measure to reduce the likelihood of GBV perpetration and exposure, addressing the shortcomings of previous prevention strategies. The curriculum will equip students with practical skills for personal development, goal setting, and resilience building, all of which are crucial for navigating life's challenges and reducing gendered vulnerabilities.

CONCLUSION

Young Women’s Policy Submission (YWPS) is a blueprint for addressing the challenges faced by young Australian women. This report is unprecedented in its systematic examination of how gender intersects with core life areas— family/friends, society, education, gender-based violence, self-esteem, health, career, financial security, political agency, and policy preferences. Such comprehensive documentation of young Australian women’s lives across these areas has not been systematically completed until now, making the YWPS an essential guide for shaping policy.

The policy recommendations proposed are evidence and consultation informed. Given the government’s stated objectives – eliminating gender-based violence in a generation and achieving gender equality – young people are imperative; YWPS offers this lens.

Young Women’s Policy Submission (YWPS) is not static. It is a call to action and an ongoing effort. We urge stakeholders to implement these policy recommendations, complete better data collection on young women, and be concerted in creating a gender-just Australia.



YOUNG WOMEN'S ALLIANCE
AUSTRALIA

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Young Women's Policy Submission

