

FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Motion

HON MATTHEW SWINBOURN (East Metropolitan) [10.46 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house notes the continuing and unacceptable toll that family and domestic violence takes on women, men and children, and condemns all forms of family and domestic violence.

My motion today is a rather simple one, but the impact of what it reflects in our society is incredibly significant. It would be an understatement to say that family and domestic violence is a scourge on our society. The recent terrible incident in Queensland has brought the issue to the further attention of our community, but it would be fair to say that although such high-profile incidents bring it to our attention, it continues to exist in our society. One of the things I will talk about today is the prevalence of family and domestic violence in our society.

I will take this moment to mark the loss of Hannah Baxter and her three children in terrible and appalling circumstances, which I do not think any decent person could be anything other than horrified by. The circumstances that occurred are terrifying for anybody with a family, or anybody else. I pass on my condolences to the members of her family, her friends, and all those who have been impacted by what happened in those appalling circumstances. I condemn the actions of her former partner who, for whatever reason, could find no way of dealing with his issues other than to hurt his family. It will always remain a mystery to me how he could put himself in that situation and hurt those he supposedly loved. I send my condolences to them.

The Department of Communities defines family and domestic violence as the intentional and systematic use of violence and abuse to control, coerce or create fear in others. Family and domestic violence is not limited to violence between intimate partners and their children; it includes violence between siblings, parents, adolescents, people in care and their carers, and as Hon Nick Goiran and I know, within the setting of elder abuse.

What is considered domestic violence? Violence takes many forms, not just a physical form. It can be physical, and it is most often seen in that light because it leaves evidence, but violence can take the form of emotional abuse, sexual abuse, social abuse, and spiritual abuse. It also includes controlling behaviours. According to the Duluth model, which is the most widely accepted model for understanding family and domestic violence, it can include the use of coercion and threats; intimidation; emotional abuse; isolation; minimising, denying and blaming—often referred to as gaslighting—the using of children; the using of male privilege; and economic abuse.

Quite simply, family and domestic violence is the use of one person's power over another. Of course, family and domestic violence can have severe effects on a person or family's health, physically, psychologically, emotionally and socially. There are immediate impacts that come to mind, such as bruising and fractures, which can be evidence, but this does not occur in all cases. Victims often develop health issues such as depression, anxiety, eating disorders, fatigue and sleep issues. This can lead to substance abuse, self-harm and suicide attempts. Victims are also at a higher risk of homelessness, unemployment and isolation. Children are particularly impacted by family and domestic violence. It takes a significant toll on them. Children can be born premature or have a low birth weight, and there is a possibility of miscarriage, fetal injury and even fetal death in circumstances in which family and domestic violence occurs. Babies and toddlers can develop anxiety, feeding or sleep difficulties, and be extremely demanding or very passive, underweight, neglected and physically injured. Preschoolers can have eating difficulties, concentration issues, developmental delay and issues with clinginess, and school-age children can be defiant, rebel, have temper tantrums, physically abuse others, be overly compliant and withdraw from social situations, and their school performance may suffer. Adolescents may develop eating disorders, abuse substances, develop depression, underperform academically and display violent behaviours. Those are very concerning things. It really comes down to the fact that the impact delays or holds back those children from developing into normal, happy contributors to our society.

How prevalent is family and domestic violence in our society? In Australia, on average, one woman a week is murdered by her current or former partner. I will repeat that: on average, every week, a woman is killed by her current or former partner in Australia. That is at least 52 women a year. That is a significant toll on our community. Members may have noticed that the ABC keeps a counter on its webpage of incidents of police response to family and domestic violence. When I looked at it about an hour ago, the police had already responded to 300 incidents today. That is a massive prevalence. One in four women over the age of 15 have experienced emotional abuse by a current or former partner. One in seven men have experienced emotional abuse by a current or former partner. One in five women over the age of 15 have experienced sexual violence, and 85 per cent of Australian women have been sexually harassed. Almost 40 per cent of women continue to experience violence from their partner while temporarily separated, and one in six women over the age of 15 have experienced stalking—one in six. These numbers are just incredible in terms of their impact on people.

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Western Australia has recorded the largest number of family and domestic violence–related homicide offences. In 2018, there were 37 victims across all jurisdictions for which data is published. That is not a figure we should be proud of in any way, shape or form. We cannot be proud. It is trite to say that we could even think of it in those terms. Between 2012 and 2016, two Australian Bureau of Statistics personal safety surveys found that in the preceding 12 months, Western Australia had the second-highest rate of reported physical and sexual violence against women, second only to the Northern Territory. In 2018, at least two out of five assaults recorded were related to family and domestic violence, ranging from 38 per cent in the Australian Capital Territory to 61 per cent in Western Australia. In 2018, there were 684 victims of assault per 100 000 persons in WA. Over 70 per cent of family and domestic violence–related assault victims are women, and—perhaps the most telling of figures—around 90 per cent of all victims of violence experience that violence from a male perpetrator. As shocking as these figures are, they underestimate the true extent of family and domestic violence in our society. This is what is recorded and reported; it is not what actually happens out there. Unfortunately, it is probably far more prevalent than these figures reflect, because one of the most difficult things for a victim of family and domestic violence to do is to put their hand up and tell on the person perpetrating that violence. That is because of the fear of repercussions associated with speaking out or seeking help. Many will just not report the violence that they have experienced. The ABS personal safety survey estimates that as few as 20 per cent of victims of family and domestic violence currently contact the police for assistance.

How does society respond to that? In recent cases, we have seen the difficulties around the way that we respond to family and domestic violence. The language around family and domestic violence is incredibly important, and for a long time that language focused on victim blaming: “She shouldn’t have done this”, “She shouldn’t have done that”, “If she had just kept her mouth shut, she wouldn’t have got that”, “If she didn’t wear those clothes, it wouldn’t have happened to her.” That is simply wrong. We need to focus on the perpetrators and the responsibility that they should take for their actions—the things that they choose to do—not what the victims suffer. We do not do it in other parts of our society when we talk about violence, so why have we done it for family and domestic violence? It is difficult. People will misspeak, and that is something that they will correct, but, ultimately, we must focus on the responsibility that perpetrators must take for the actions that they engage in.

We have services available for perpetrators and victims, and I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the organisations that help to address family and domestic violence in our community. One area that does not often get much love is the Department of Communities, but there are many people within the Department of Communities—probably the overwhelming majority of them—who are selfless and dedicated people who are trying to help those in our society who need it, so I would like to pass my gratitude, respect and acknowledgement on to those people. They do a job that is often very thankless. They do a job for which they are often criticised mercilessly for what they do, but let us never lose sight of the bigger picture: they are there and they are trying to help us, so I thank them very much. Of course our police, paramedics and health professionals are at the front line of this. I thank them for their involvement and the assistance that they have given. Those agencies have come a long way from some of the dark days in the way that they deal with domestic violence and family violence. Of course, there is always more they can do. I thank all the refuges out there. Starick is a refuge in my electorate. I thank the refuges for the work that they do in supporting people who are victims of family and domestic violence. Groups such as the Multicultural Communities Council of WA, which is a new group set up in my electorate as well, are helping people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to access services. Unfortunately, people from a CALD background are often in an even more precarious situation than others, because they not only have language and cultural barriers, but also sometimes do not understand what is available to help them. I commend the work of the Multicultural Communities Council in trying to connect them to the services that are available for them and to help them in those situations.

I have some concluding thoughts. It is easy to say, “Why didn’t they leave?”, but that is one of the worst things we could say. Often, it is not possible for people to leave. Family situations are always complex. It is always complex. They may not be able to physically leave. They may not have the financial support to be able to leave. They may just be too scared to leave. We should never, ever say to a person, “Why didn’t you just leave?” Their partner may have threatened to inflict violence either on them or their children if they left. They may fear never being able to have contact with their children and their wider family, or the partner might try to guilt the victim into staying. Maybe we need to question why they did not leave, but we should never say to victims, “Why didn’t you leave?” We have to understand that. We must continue to take steps as a society, as a government and as individuals to address family and domestic violence. I note that the McGowan government has introduced the Family Violence Legislation Reform Bill 2019, which is a bill to address family and domestic violence. It is in the other place, and I look forward to our opportunity to debate that when it comes to our place. I will leave it to the minister to speak more about that.

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I commend the government for taking the action of bringing in further legislation, but we must all recognise that legislation alone will not address this fundamental problem in our society. It just does not fix these issues. It is a response to a symptom; it does not cure the underlying problem. In our society, we need a cultural change in which we do not accept at any level that family and domestic violence is acceptable at all, and we need to take steps to make sure that that cultural change happens.

For those men out there who think violence, in any of its forms, is an acceptable response to this issue that they might be having in their relationships, I simply say this: you are wrong. Violence is never an appropriate response. It does not matter how you feel, you cannot respond in a violent manner. Deal with your issues. I also say this: if you have issues with the way you deal with your anger, take responsibility for it. Go and get some help. There is help out there. At the end of the day, it is the individual who must take responsibility for their action. You are the one who inflicts it on your family, nobody else, so you take responsibility.

Finally, as a father of three wonderful boys, I hope I have done what I can to make sure that they will never see violence as an acceptable response to issues in their life or their relationships. I have tried to do this by way of example and by my parenting. It is the very least I can do as a man and as a father to try to change our culture. I encourage every other father to try to do that with their sons.

HON DONNA FARAGHER (East Metropolitan) [11.00 am]: Hon Nick Goiran has kindly let me say a few words—because I have to attend a meeting, which the Minister for Education and Training is aware of—in the context of my role as the shadow Minister for Women’s Interests. I also want to rise very briefly to support the family and domestic violence motion that has been moved today, and I want to join Hon Matthew Swinbourn wholeheartedly in the comments that he has made. He has put forward a very strong argument. It is an issue that we should be debating, particularly given that this is also the week that we recognise International Women’s Day. The campaign for this year is “Each for Equal”. An equal world is an enabled world. Through shared responsibility and individual actions, we can achieve gender equality, whether that is in the workplace, in our community or in our homes.

Although a lot has been achieved, there is still a lot more that needs to be done. Of course, the area that is obviously the subject matter of today’s motion is one of those. Everyone within our community should be free from harm, but in the case of women, we do know that they are far more likely to experience some form of violence in their lifetime. The report released last week by the Minister for Women’s Interests had some very sobering statistics. One in five WA women reported experiencing partner violence since the age of 15. WA Police Force data shows that in 2017–18, there were almost 3 400 breaches of family violence restraining orders issues in relation to victims who were women and girls. In 2017–18, 700 women in Western Australia reported being victims of recent sexual assault compared with 44 men. In 2016, 27.7 per cent of WA women and girls did not walk alone after dark, because they felt unsafe, compared with only 3.8 per cent of men. Physical violence was experienced by 3.3 per cent of WA women in 2016 compared with 2.2 per cent of men. With those statistics and many others in mind, it is absolutely—I agree with Hon Matthew Swinbourn—up to us, as a government, as members of Parliament, the non-government sector and, most importantly, our community to take action, to support these women and their families and to support initiatives, whether they are at the preventive stage or through laws or the delivery of various supports for victims aimed at keeping them safe and which can provide an opportunity to start a new life.

In this regard, like Hon Matthew Swinbourn, I also want to very much acknowledge those women and men who work tirelessly every day to support women and children who are escaping family and domestic violence. I want to acknowledge those who work within organisations directly supporting these victims, and the frontline officers—police officers, ambulance officers, hospital staff, child protection workers and all the various other support workers that fall within this realm.

As shadow Minister for Women’s Interests and as a local member, I regularly meet with people in this critical area. Hon Matthew Swinbourn mentioned Starick. I have been out there, along with Hon Nick Goiran. We have met with many women’s refuges, and Hon Nick Goiran and I regularly go together. These refuges provide not only safe and secure accommodation for women and children, but also a range of other services to help them get on a better path, both in the immediate and longer term. They provide financial counselling, general counselling, emotional support and referral services, as well as a range of other assessments and support. Equally, for their children, various supports are provided, including counselling, homework help, playgroups and after-school and school holiday programs. Outreach services are also provided by a number of organisations. The Lincoln Street outreach service, which is run by the Salvation Army, which we have also visited, is another example. Many other groups and organisations do amazing things.

It would be fantastic if we did not have to have these organisations, but, sadly, today we are talking about some of the statistics that have been put forward by Hon Matthew Swinbourn. But it is not just statistics; these are people. These are women and children who need support. My electorate has The Esther Foundation in Kalamunda. I have been a long-time supporter, and I was at a breakfast just this morning to speak with the people there and on Esther’s

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behalf about the great work that they do. Every one of those girls who come into Esther's care is someone's daughter. Every one of those girls has challenges that need to be overcome. Family and domestic violence may not be part of every girl's story, but it is certainly characterised by many. Esther is a lifesaver for many of these women, and its role can never be underestimated. To hear the background stories, and I heard it again today, of girls who come into Esther's care is heartbreaking. But to also hear the renewed focus on life, their commitment to making changes and to making positive changes for themselves and their families is amazing.

Equally, I use the opportunity of this motion to thank a number of organisations that work in this critical area, because I do not think we thank them enough. Another organisation in the East Metropolitan Region, which I had the pleasure of hosting a morning tea for last year, is Starting Over Support, which is an initiative of People Who Care. For those members who do not know what SOS is all about, it is dedicated to providing free household goods and furniture to individuals and families, particularly those escaping family and domestic violence. The reality is that many of these women leave and they have absolutely nothing. The women are referred by women's refuges and other agencies. SOS has a warehouse and I encourage members to go if they have never been and see what it has. SOS effectively provides them with all the staples that they need to start a new life and to start a new home. It is absolutely fantastic. Brad and his team out there are amazing people. All these are examples of supports that are having a positive impact and are helping women and families get back on a path that has a future without violence and without harm.

I conclude by saying that no-one should be subjected to violence, no child should be subjected to violence and no child should witness violence in their home. No-one should ever feel worthless, afraid or forced to do things that they do not want to do. No-one should die at the hands of another. I simply want to thank Hon Matthew Swinbourn for moving this motion today. It is a good motion, and I certainly support it.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Steve Thomas): The question is that the motion be agreed to. I was going to call Hon Samantha Rowe, who I was told was next, followed by Hon Alison Xamon, to give you an indication of order, and then some Labor members after that. I thought I saw Hon Samantha Rowe quietly seek the call.

HON SAMANTHA ROWE (East Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary) [11.09 am]: No problems at all; thank you, Mr Acting President. I most definitely want to speak this morning on this motion on family and domestic violence that has been moved by my friend and colleague Hon Matthew Swinbourn. It is certainly a very timely debate to be having in this chamber, given the latest tragedies we have witnessed, including the devastating deaths of Hannah Clarke and her three beautiful children who were murdered by her estranged husband. This is definitely a good time to be debating this issue. The issue of domestic violence and the safety of women and children should most definitely be at the forefront of our minds, not just now because it is in the media, it has been reported on and we are seeing it in our newspapers and on the daily news, but until we are in a society that no longer accepts violence against women.

Here in Western Australia we have a chronic problem with domestic and family violence. WA has the nation's second highest rate of reported physical and sexual violence perpetrated against women. It is definitely a very big issue not just for the nation, but also here in Western Australia. The Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence has recently released a report entitled "Stronger Together: WA's Plan for Gender Equality", and it talks about the fact that gender equality and women's safety are related to cases of family and domestic violence. I want to read from page 10 of the report, which states —

Evidence shows that gender inequality, including beliefs, attitudes and behaviours relating to gender, set the social conditions that enable violence towards women. Perpetrators of family and domestic violence and sexual offences are overwhelmingly men. Individuals who do not see men and women as equal, or who believe in very traditional gender roles, are more likely to tolerate, excuse or condone violence against women. Working to achieve gender equality is fundamental to breaking the cycle of violence against women.

It is unfortunate, because the 2018 results of the National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey demonstrates that sizeable portions of the community continue to believe that there are circumstances in which violence against women is acceptable and that women should bear some of the responsibility for men's actions. For example, one in five people, or 21 per cent, believed that violence results from a woman making a man so angry that he hits her when he did not mean to. One in five people believe that a lot of what is called "domestic violence" is really just a normal reaction to day-to-day stress and frustration. Nearly one in six Australians believe that women who flirt all the time are somewhat to blame when their partner gets jealous and hits them, and it goes on. I think these figures are alarming. I think this type of attitude is alarming and we should be very concerned about it, because violence towards women is never okay and never acceptable. Like my colleague Hon Matthew Swinbourn I am really pleased that we are seeing some legislation currently being debated in the other place around family and domestic violence. I think that is a really good step in the right direction. Unfortunately, there is always so

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much more that we need to do. We need to make sure that we do our part here to legislate and make reforms. We need to make sure that community members, and men, call out bad behaviour when they see it, that we do not allow victim blaming and that we understand what family and domestic violence looks like and what we can do about it.

As I was doing some research for this motion this morning, I came across a Facebook post about domestic violence written by a gentleman called Toby Francis. It is an account of him being called out by a mate. I want to share some of it with the house, because this is a really important issue. We need men to call out other men. It reads —

When I first moved out, and Lauren and I had just started living together, I would get angry and break things. Smash a plate, or break a broom out the back.

My mate Troy and I were driving to Broadway Shopping Centre one day and I told him about an argument that Lauren and I had that ended up with me smashing something. He told me, in no uncertain terms, that what I was doing was violence that would one day turn into me pushing Lauren, which would one day turn into me punching Lauren, which would one day turn into me hitting our kids. And it might stop there but maybe it wouldn't. Maybe one day it would turn into the kind of thing we have seen happen just recently where a man set a car alight with his children and their mother inside ...

I remember being shocked and resistant to the idea. I would never—and have never—hit or physically hurt my partner. I was not the kind of man that would commit domestic violence, let alone MURDER someone. Let alone a woman, let alone my partner. I was just the kind of person who needed to break a rake now and then when Lauren and I couldn't resolve a fight. That was all it was. Just a plate or two. Or a hole in the wall.

But what Troy said wouldn't leave my mind. He was so very angry with me at the time ...

So I read up on it that night. I read stories from domestic violence survivors, I read articles and advice written by experts who deal with this sort of thing. And Troy was right. Abusive words escalate, smashing stuff escalates, pushing escalates, punching escalates. Murder doesn't. Murder is the final escalation.

I was gobsmacked. Sad. Confused. I was a good man. I loved my partner. I would love our kids. I would never—had never—laid a hand on her. But every thing I read began similarly, “he always used to get angry, and then he started punching holes in the wall/smashing plates/slamming doors.” These stories ended with violence. Always. Because, I realised, they started with violence.

The smashing of plates, the slamming of doors, the punching of walls. It's all violence. It's all the start of a burning wick that leads to a horrific end. These objects are placeholders for the people we aren't allowed to hit. And one day, those placeholders don't do the job anymore and a push makes its way into the argument. Just a push. It's not a big deal, you rationalise, and you're sorry. And it won't happen again, you say. And you don't want it to happen again, you know. Because, of course you don't. You are a good man. A good man who doesn't hit his partner, doesn't beat his kids, wouldn't cover the car in petrol and set them alight.

...

Obviously, I don't know what would have happened if Troy hadn't called me on my behaviour. Maybe none of it would have escalated. That's not what the research says is likely but maybe I am different. Maybe I just would have smashed plates forever. But that's the point, we don't know where that ends. We only know that, unaddressed, that behaviour has only two possible outcomes: it either stays the same or it escalates. Those are the only two choices. There is no possible world in which someone starts breaking kitchenware and just one day stops all of a sudden. They either keep breaking kitchenware or they move onto people. Or, they get help.

It goes on, Mr Acting President, and I will not read it all out. I just want to get to the end where he says —

... we must be better men. We must be better husbands and partners. We must be better fathers. And we must be better mates. Like Troy was to me. Nothing will change without us changing ourselves, without holding our friends and family members accountable, change can only truly come from us because it starts there. And it ends there. It starts and ends with us.

I never thanked Troy for what he did and said that day. I never thanked him for his caring, rational, non-judgmental, and non-violent anger. But he'll read this so here it is: Thank you for what you said that day, thank you for holding me accountable, and thank you for helping me be better. Thank you for being what it actually means to be a mate.

It is time for all of us to leave the want to be a good man behind and embrace the need to be a better one. Because that's the only kind of good that matters.

I just wanted to share that with the house.

HON ALISON XAMON (North Metropolitan) [11.19 am]: I rise in support of this thoughtful motion that is consistent with the sorts of thoughtful motions that we routinely see from this member. We are having to talk about this issue right now specifically because of Hannah Clarke—I note that Hannah herself had started using her maiden name before she was killed—and her three children, Laianah, Aaliyah and Trey, who were brutally murdered only last month. Her story was particularly horrific. The distressing truth is that in Australia, approximately one woman is killed every week by a current or former partner. Last year, 61 women were killed by violence and nine have been killed so far this year. Family and domestic violence is occurring at crisis levels. Every sitting fortnight in federal Parliament, my Greens colleague Senator Larissa Waters moves a motion that includes the number of women who have been killed by violence in Australia. Every time she does that, the number has increased. Her motion calls on the federal government to properly fund frontline domestic violence services and ensure that frontline prevention programs are being appropriately funded. She has noted that funds allocated under the “National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children” are woefully inadequate and far less than what our experts say is needed to address the crisis. We know that a funding commitment of \$5 billion over 10 years is the sort of money that we are talking about needing. The federal Attorney-General has responded by saying that the issue of family and domestic violence is too complex to be fixed with funding. Yes, but although it is complex, the truth of the matter is that it cannot be fixed without funding. It requires enough funding, for a start, to ensure that crisis support services do not have to turn away women and children simply because they do not have the resources to help them when they are reaching out for help. As has been pointed out, it is really hard for people to reach out for help, so when they do, the one thing we need to do is make sure that help is available. Instead, we are finding that beds are full and some of the phone calls cannot be answered simply because we do not have enough resources. Funding could fix these issues today, and it absolutely has to. Despite the need, the sad fact of the matter is that the federal government has recently cut funding to some critical frontline services such as the National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services forum and the Safe Places Emergency Accommodation program.

My colleague Senator Waters’ motion also calls on the government to publicise a national toll of women who have been killed by violence, just as we do with the road toll, so that we can keep this issue in the public eye and contribute to a change in the culture that allows it to continue. I think that is an excellent initiative. I note the important work that Destroy the Joint does to publicise this figure in the absence of a public national toll. Every sitting fortnight, Senator Waters’ motion passes without going to a vote and the federal government continues not to do anywhere near enough. I wonder what it will take before we see real action from the federal government to stop the epidemic of violence against women and children. Family and domestic violence is ultimately preventable. We absolutely need to make sure that we put in more funding to ensure that women and children are kept safe.

We also need an improved justice response. I acknowledge the state government’s work in this space, including particularly law reform, which we will debate shortly. However, as I am sure it is widely acknowledged, law reform is only one aspect. We also need better access to a broad range of legal support, including more funding for Legal Aid, the Aboriginal Legal Service, and for our community legal centre sector, which is very often at the front line of dealing with crises. We need better training for police, court staff, the judiciary and, of course, improved enforcement of restraining orders and better victim support services. It is important to ensure that our services are meeting the cultural needs specifically of Aboriginal women and families, and we need specific services for women with disability and for women on temporary visas. All three of those cohorts of women are at higher risk of family and domestic violence. We need to ensure that we invest more in behaviour change programs, particularly by ensuring that we establish the evidence base around the most effective program models.

On that point, I note that the federal government has recently announced \$2.4 million for four behaviour change programs in New South Wales, Queensland and, fortunately, here in Western Australia. We will need more investment to address gender inequities. I also note the extraordinarily disturbing media following Hannah’s death. Clearly, we need to do much more work to change how we think about and talk about violence against women. Our Watch has called for a national gender equality strategy to focus on and prioritise the reforms that are needed. No woman should ever be turned away when she reaches out for help. We know that our crisis response services are under-resourced and overworked. They are doing an amazing job with the money they have, but it is not enough and all governments have an important role to play. Our Watch and other stakeholders have called on all governments to move beyond words, and it has been calling for action. Our Watch has said that what is very clear is that there is a compelling need for additional funding for violence against women strategies in all states and territories, including frontline crisis response, early intervention services and longer term prevention strategies, to prevent this violence from happening in the first place.

The Council of Australian Governments is meeting tomorrow. I hope that meeting will result in a commitment to do more to address family and domestic violence and commit to provide more funding and long-term prevention

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work to address gender inequality, including structural and systemic inequalities that are increasing the vulnerability of women.

I recognise that a huge amount of work in the family and domestic violence space is being done by community sector organisations. Unfortunately, broader sector funding is not keeping pace with the need. It is a highly feminised workforce, which comprises approximately 80 per cent of women in this space. Heading International Women's Day this year was the Western Australian Council of Social Service and the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services. They called on the government to commit to providing further funding to community sector organisations. The federal government's equal remuneration order supplementation funding, which is about \$500 million a year nationally, is set to expire next year. We need better state government funding to ensure the sustainability of these services, otherwise we will find that the delivery of services will get worse rather than better. According to the Your Help Western Australia campaign, we need about a 19.88 per cent increase in catch-up funding. I welcome the McGowan government's allocation of \$60 million over four years. However, this amount will be well short of the levels needed to sustain services. We need to make sure that the sector is viable and can meet the needs of family and domestic violence services, which is at a crisis level, and it requires an all-of-government response.

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the House) [11.27 am]: I thank my colleague Hon Matthew Swinbourn for raising this motion today. One sign that I think shows that we are doing better in this area is that when I came into this place 19 years ago, I do not believe a man would have brought this motion before the house. In that sense, the community debate has shifted so that it is a man who has brought this motion before the house. That is a good sign that we have moved on.

I thank members whom I have heard from so far for their contributions. This is a really important matter for us to debate. Western Australia has the second highest rate in Australia of reported physical and sexual violence against women. That is not a statistic that we, as Western Australians, need to be proud of, but it is a stat that drives us, as government, to continue to work in this area. Members who have spoken so far have also talked about the legal and service delivery changes that are being made. I make the point that there is not one single policy lever that we can pull to fix the pervasiveness of violence against women and children. There is no silver bullet. We need to do all those things, and that is what this government is doing under our Stopping Family and Domestic Violence policy.

Members have already heard about some of the work that we have been doing. There is no quick fix. We need to make changes to our laws. We need best evidence to inform our work. We need to make changes to our policies and practices for first responders, such as training on family and domestic violence for police officers. We need to keep building refuges as safe places for survivors to go to escape the crisis and to support their recovery. We need to put in place more perpetrator programs and measures to hold them to account for their behaviour. We need to continuously push for community awareness and action so that all of these things are designed for one unequivocal message—that family and domestic violence is unacceptable.

Hon Matthew Swinbourn made a point about victim blaming. Survivors need to be believed and they need safety and protection, but we also need to challenge the victim blaming in public commentary and news reporting. We know why it happens. Work done on testing community attitudes to family and domestic violence has found that one in five Australians believe that domestic violence is a normal reaction to stress and that sometimes a woman can make a man so angry that he hits her without meaning to, and that one in three believe that if a woman does not leave her abusive partner, then she is responsible for the violence continuing. It is views like those that keep the problem of family and domestic violence in place and keep it hidden. Victim blaming can be the reason that someone does not talk about what is happening to them and why someone does not reach out for help. That is a real issue that we need to tackle. Each of us is a leader in our respective communities and we can do our part in breaking that cycle by making sure that we use appropriate language when we talk about this issue.

The Family Violence Legislation Reform Bill 2029 is before the other place as we speak, and I look forward to the debate on it in this house. However, I make the point that that is only one part of a range of measures that any government needs to put in place, and it is one part of the measures that we are putting in place.

I know others want to speak so I am not going to hold the floor for much longer, other than to say that I, too, would like to give a shout-out to the non-government providers of services in this area, in particular to Angela and her crew at the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services, which is the peak body for women's refuges in Western Australia. It has been an outstanding policy voice and has provided direct services to women through its website, which it has put in place in an innovative way. For example, there is a quick exit on the face page of its website so that if a woman is looking for information and somebody comes into the room who might be threatening to her, she can press one button to quickly exit the website so that they do not see the information she is looking at. That organisation has been at the forefront of some of the most innovative policy development. It was at the forefront of the Safe at Home program and at the forefront of fundraising for essential whitegoods—

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which is part of what Hon Donna Faragher was talking about—being made available for women when they leave and have to set up a whole new home. It has also been at the forefront of the innovative policy and service delivery for children who are the subject of family and domestic violence. A collection of research now shows unequivocally that exposure to this kind of trauma has a physiological effect on the development of a child's brain, and the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services has led some of that work.

I commend Hon Matthew Swinbourn for bringing the motion to the house. The government takes this issue very seriously. It has a range of policies and is taking steps to give effect to them, but we must all be vigilant. We can always do more and that is what we are working hard to do.

HON MARTIN PRITCHARD (North Metropolitan) [11.33 am]: Ten minutes is not enough time to speak on this issue, but I will try to truncate my comments so other members can speak on it. I want to thank Hon Matthew Swinbourn for the motion. It is a great subject to bring on for debate. All previous speakers have been very eloquent and have given a lot of information, but my contribution will not be so eloquent because I am bringing it closer to home. One big problem is that for some reason there seems to be shame when people talk about their own family and abuse within it, and there should not be. It should be just another issue and problem that we as individuals and as a society try to deal with.

In my inaugural speech I talked about the challenges my family faced when we emigrated from England. I spoke about my father and mother breaking up, which was probably brought on by my mother's concerns about having some freedom. I presume there were some issues back in England with the make-up of the family, but I was too young to remember what they were. While my father went away to earn money so that we could build a house for the family settle down in, my mother got very lonely and sought other comforts. When my father came back down from Tom Price he heard about this and, obviously, became angry. There was violence, some that the children saw; some that I saw and some that I did not. The violence was by my father on my mother. I have a lot of love and respect for my father, but he was wrong. That was not the way to try to resolve the issues that they were having. It did nothing to promote love and harmony within the family and it eventually did nothing to help their relationship. My mother still left. My father did the right and honourable thing for us children and brought us up. But he was wrong to have committed that violence against my mother. Obviously, she had to leave—not just leave Perth but Western Australia—because my father would get on the drink and hunt her down and try to commit more violence against her. He was hurt; I understand that. I understand that when people are in that situation, they try to hurt the other person as much as they have been hurt. Then the other person feels as though they need to reciprocate and it escalates and escalates. In some circumstances, people decide that it is a good idea to use their children to hurt their partner, and members today have reported on where that can ultimately lead. That happened in my family and I am sure it happens in many families.

I make the point—again, I will try to make it quickly—that there are a number of reasons that there is so much focus on the fact that men commit domestic violence. The first is—this was the case in my family—because the father holds all the money. My mother was financially dependent on my father. He was the one who brought in the wages each week, so she could not just get up and leave. Then, of course, there is the physical aspect. My father was much stronger than my mother, as he proved when he hit her. But that is not the response that any real man should take. The point I make—I do not think any government in Australia would ever, ever ban alcohol—is that alcohol and drugs always make it worse. As I said, I respect my father—God bless him; I hope he does not take this too offensively—but because he used to drink, he thought one good way to bring up his son was to introduce him to alcohol early. I think that probably by the age of sixteen-and-a-half I was going out with the boys, having a beer and getting pissed—drunk every night. My apologies.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Steve Thomas): Thank you, honourable member.

Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD: I got out of school as quickly as I could. I tried to get a job as quickly as I could, mainly so that I could go to the pub to play pool and drink. My dad gave me a job as a bricklayer's labourer for a while, and that was great. We used to go to the pub together every night and play pool. When I got married I was probably getting drunk every night. Then it became a little bit harder because we did not have a lot of money. We were living on one wage and had a couple of kids, so I used to make my own beer and still try to get drunk every night. I was pretty much an alcoholic, I would have thought. I would notice that I was not a particularly nice drunk. I was never violent, but I was sulky and passive aggressive, so at the age of 29 I decided that I did not need to drink anymore. It is maybe not as easy for other people to give it up, but I found it quite easy to give up drinking. I would encourage everybody, man or woman, to maybe look at their life and think, "Do I really need alcohol or drugs to have a happy and successful life?" I think if people were to really look at it, they would realise that they probably do not. In my experience, in every circumstance and in every way, alcohol and drugs generally make things worse, certainly in respect of domestic violence. In my family, alcohol made it 100 per cent worse. Thank you.

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HON NICK GOIRAN (South Metropolitan) [11.40 am]: I am pleased on behalf of the opposition to rise in support of this motion. I want to thank Hon Matthew Swinbourn for his wisdom in choosing this as a topic for discussion today, and couching it in such a way that all members can give it their wholehearted support. I will also briefly take a moment to recognise the contribution made just now by Hon Martin Pritchard, which was courageous, amongst many other things that could be said about it, and I thank him for it.

I want to explain to the mover of the motion that I wholeheartedly support every word that he has penned in the motion, yet this topic, for which I have responsibility as shadow minister, is one on which I have reached the point of exasperation. I am not exasperated because of the honourable member's motion, or of the good intentions with which he has brought it; I commend him for the speech he gave earlier today. I am exasperated when we see the problems of family and domestic violence and the impacts that it has on children, and we as leaders in our communities identify these problems, but then nothing is done about them.

I will give members one example. On 12 November last year, I attended the Estimates and Financial Operations hearings and asked —

... what is the current notification process that ensures that the department is informed in the event that a child in care's parent is convicted of any offence?

We are talking about children who have witnessed domestic violence. The case I am talking about is one in which the father had murdered the mother. The Department of Communities decided that it would take the baby for a visit to the father, who was the murderer of the mother. My point to the department at the time was that there seemed to be a systemic gap. In fact, my comment at the same hearing was —

This is not a criticism, because it is not your fault if you are not told about it, but that is an unacceptable gap, in my view, in the system—that there is not communication happening between whoever has that information and the department that is responsible for that child in care, least of all in circumstances where it may well be safe—physically safe—to be bringing a child into a prison to visit the convicted murderer of that child's mother. It might be physically safe to do that, but I cannot accept that it is psychologically safe and not re-traumatising for that child, in circumstances in which a court of law has said beyond reasonable doubt that that person has done that. I think that is a gap that needs to be addressed and I would ask for the minister to draw that to the attention of the minister responsible for this department.

In response to that, Hon Sue Ellery indicated that she would do so, but most importantly, the director general said —

I thank the member for bringing that to our attention. I will also commit to have that on the agenda. We have established regular meetings with the head of Justice. That will be on the agenda for our next meeting.

I responded by saying thank you. That interaction took place in November last year. Yesterday in question time, I asked what date that meeting had taken place. I was told it had taken place on 5 February. I asked whether the matter had been discussed, and the answer was no. It is easy for us to have these debates, but I think the rhetoric continues time and again. Every time there is a high-profile example, it is easy for any of us to express sympathy, but all that rhetoric is meaningless in the absence of action. In this example from November last year, there was genuine good intent from the opposition, the government and the bureaucracy, and there was a meeting of minds in which we agreed that there was a problem. Clearly, the Department of Communities needs to know when one of the biological parents of a child is convicted of an offence, particularly in a horrendous case of family and domestic violence that actually involved the murder of the mother. We agreed, on a bipartisan basis and with good intent, that there was a systemic gap here, and the chief bureaucrat said, "I agree with you, member. I'm going to take this up at the next meeting." We then get to March of the following year and I have to ask a question of the government to find out when the meeting took place; they say it was in February. I ask whether the matter was addressed or discussed and the answer is no.

That is why I am exasperated. These motions are important. The will of the 36 members of this place is good and we all have good intent, but that is meaningless if no action is taken when problems are identified. I hope today's motion will be the start of a rejuvenated effort to see action in this important space. I thank the honourable member for bringing the motion to our attention.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.