



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

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HANSARD EXTRACT

**DOMESTIC, FAMILY & SEXUAL
VIOLENCE**

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This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

If we want to solve homelessness we need to address domestic, family and sexual violence because this is the main reason that women and children leave their homes and the most common reason for seeking assistance from homelessness services in the Northern Territory.

If we want to reduce our prisoner numbers we need to address this because two-thirds of prisoners are held for domestic and family violence-related offences.

If we want to reduce the strain on our police officers we need to address this because police respond to more than 100 domestic, family and sexual violence incidents every day.

If we want to stop youth crime we need to address this because domestic and family violence is also a strong indicator for children entering the criminal justice system.

If we want to fix our economy we need to address this because domestic and family violence costs \$21.7bn in Australia every year. The cost of domestic, family and sexual violence in the Northern Territory has been calculated at close to \$600m a year. These are the costs of our police, prison system, courts, hospitals and children protection system which are spending most of their time responding to domestic, family and sexual violence.

If we want to close the gap we need to address this because it is the leading cause of Aboriginal children being placed in out-of-home care nationally.

I am heartened to hear the bipartisan commitment across this Chamber to address this issue that affects every one of us. Every life is a universe. Every woman killed is a universe lost to her friends, family and community. We cannot afford to ignore this.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Mr Deputy Speaker, I welcome the raising of this matter of public importance by the Leader of the Opposition. Domestic, family and sexual violence are matters of deep public importance across all electorates, including my electorate of Fong Lim.

I thank the Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence for her contribution to this debate on behalf of the government and for clearly explaining the scope of the issues. There is a cost in every way to society, of course, but to the victims in the first instance when we are talking about these issues. As has been raised by other members, the social and economic costs are innumerable.

Our government is clearly committed to reduction and prevention. I thank the minister for articulating clearly in her statement that we acknowledge the scope of this problem, do not seek in any way to diminish it and are committed to the prevention of domestic violence.

This is a serendipitous and timely matter of public importance, given our discussions on alcohol policy today and the suite of legislation we are considering in this parliamentary sitting, last week and this week.

The proposer for this matter of public importance seeks a strong bipartisan approach to addressing these issues, a commitment reaffirmed by our minister and echoed by every voice in this Chamber in respect of the contributions that have been made to this debate. It is in that spirit that I am also participating in this debate to share with all of you as colleagues a small portion of what I learned in preparing for debate on the Bills under recent or current consideration.

You have all heard me raise the need to be mindful of expert evidence with specificity and not just motherhood statements or sweeping generalisations. I draw your attention to a couple of pieces of work that are salient to the debate and informative for everybody going forward. One is from the *International Journal of Drug Policy*; another is from *Drug and Alcohol Review*.

What is noticeable about these pieces of research is that they are both academic journal papers published this year; they are geographically specific to considering issues in the 25 electorates we represent; and their contributing authors are people invested in the Northern Territory and allied and associated to bodies like the Menzies School of Health Research. They are rigorous pieces of work that should inform why there is a connection between what we are seeking to do this week and the aspiration to reduce and, indeed, prevent domestic, family and sexual violence.

I will not cherry-pick data from these works. That has happened in lots of forms in this Chamber in recent years, but I am pleased to say less so in the first few days that I have been here. I do not want to distort the totality of the work, and I encourage people to make their own inquiries, but I will speak to the broad

parameters of these studies and their conclusions because they inform what everybody is calling for, which is evidence-based strategy.

Clifford, Wright, Miller, Coomber, Griffiths, Smith and Livingston produced a paper on the impacts of alcohol supply reduction measures on police-recorded adult domestic and family violence in the Northern Territory. Their work essentially looked at the Banned Drinker Register, the minimum unit price, police auxiliary liquor inspectors and daily purchase opening hours, examining data from January 2014 until February 2020.

I will quote specifically, so as not to distort their findings or put my own spin on it in any way. Their summary conclusion is as follows:

PALIs and DPOH were associated with some reductions in DFV; the BDR was associated with some increases. The upward trend commences prior to the BDR, so it is also plausible that the BDR had no effect on DFV outcomes. Although MUP was associated with reductions in the NT-wide model, there were no changes in sites without cooccurring PALIs.

This is rigorous, independent, academic research and is the kind of work we should be paying mind to. The conclusion of this body of work is:

This study provided evidence that two of the four alcohol policies assessed were associated with some reductions in DFV (PALIs and DPOH). It appears that MUP did not affect DFV outcomes. The BDR was associated with some increases, which could represent an actual increase or artificial increase. Given that the upward trend appears to commence prior to the BDR and continue after BDR, it is also possible that the BDR simply had no effect on population-level DFV outcomes. Future research should consider the impact of the BDR, as an individual ban, on individual outcomes rather than at the population level. Exploration of the impact of these policies on other alcohol-related harms would provide a more robust picture of the extent of the policies' impacts.

You can draw your own conclusions, but the most contemporaneous research produced by the people who are examining our polity suggests that there is a strong correlation between alcohol and this matter of public importance. That is why it is worth raising, not in the interest of politicising the debate but to provide context to the debate so that we are doing more than issuing motherhood statements and statements of lament and sadness.

I turn to the paper on police-recorded adult sexual assault in the Northern Territory involving alcohol and alcohol policy effects. A study done by Clifford et al examining data from 2014 to 2020 concluded:

The rate of adult sexual assaults in the NT is extremely high and many involve alcohol. Neither the Banned Drinker Register or Minimum Unit Price were associated with changes in police-recorded adult sexual assault in Greater Darwin or across the NT.

We have heard a range of statistics. These statistics are robust:

From January 2014 to December 2020 most police-recorded sexual assault victims were female (92%). Half (50%) were non-Aboriginal, 41% were Aboriginal and 9% were recorded as unknown. A large proportion of victims were assaulted by strangers (38%), followed by acquaintances (27%). Almost 1 in 4 adult sexual assaults (23%) included a domestic and family violence flag.

Drawing this back to where we are today:

Alcohol was involved in 40% of adult sexual assaults, including use by offenders, victims or both.

You cannot ignore the nexus between what we are trying to achieve and this matter of public importance.

This secondary piece of research also aimed to assess whether the introduction of two recent alcohol policies was associated with changes in police-recorded sexual assaults and concluded that neither the BDR nor MUP were associated with changes in police-recorded adult sexual assault across the NT or in greater Darwin.

The study's authors acknowledge the same limitations that have been acknowledged by others in relation to sexual assault being chronically under-reported, not least in the context of the additional challenges of remote and rural areas and alcohol being involved et cetera. They note:

While the underreporting of sexual assault is a significant limitation, provided a willingness to report has remained stable, the trends in this data will broadly represent the underlying trends in the incidence of sexual assault.

The sum of this is to carry weight in the debate that we are having more broadly. It states:

Despite the low counts, the rate of 105 adult sexual assaults per 100,000 people in the NT is extremely high, and even lower bound estimates of alcohol-involvement indicate that it is a notable factor.

Evidence-based strategies, if that is what we aspire to, will require us to acknowledge—with some degree of humility and calm—that what has been done in the last eight years in this space clearly does not have a strong evidentiary basis to support going forward in a similar direction, no matter what our intuitive or anecdotal feeling might be.

Labor raised the point, ‘What will it take to address DV?’ Addressing alcohol policy in new ways will do that, and that is precisely what this government is seeking to do in this first parliamentary sitting.

I have said a lot in defence of qualitative data collection and the body of collected testimony presented by members of this government in defence of the cohesive package we are providing to reduce crime. I have said far less about the weight of analysis of this kind.

The Member for Johnston asked, ‘What more do we need to be doing?’ We need to be paying attention to academic research. I have a small understanding of what it takes to produce content like this and the rigour that goes into this process. This work deserves to be read by everyone in this Chamber. It deserves to be respected in a distinctive way alongside the collected testimony that is presented in this House.

I therefore encourage all members to be as well informed as possible if we are of a collective mindset to address the prevention of the matter of public importance that has been raised today. That includes being mindful of research, the likes of which I have drawn attention to.

Mx McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Mr Deputy Speaker, I am heartened to see this matter brought before the parliament, so I thank the Leader of the Opposition. I thank the Member for Johnston for the minute’s silence.

I briefly refer to my first speech, in which I spoke about this issue:

Throughout the election, if I ever heard mention of domestic, family and sexual violence it was often tacked onto the end, almost as an afterthought.

I have said this many times before and say it again: domestic, family and sexual violence is the largest social issue we face, whether that is a motherhood statement or not. It is the largest aspect and driver of crime. Over 60% of men incarcerated in our prisons are there for domestic violence-related offences. We must look at all crime through the lens of DFSV. Women and children are being turned away from shelters every day, and frontline services have cried out for adequate funding for decades from both sides of politics. I am an assault survivor, and I will fully and relentlessly force the spotlight onto properly addressing this violence once and for all. The safety of my community is of the utmost importance to me; we are not safe as a community until everyone is safe.

Over the past decade as domestic, family and sexual violence has been discussed more, it has always frustrated me that the word ‘men’ was glaringly absent. The headlines were always about domestic violence or violence against women, as though this violence is being committed by some faceless nameless entity. As the Member for Gwoja said, ‘Our words matter’. If we cannot name the problem, how will we ever fix it?

I know that men are also victims of family violence, as are children, but the perpetrators who commit violence against women, boys and girls and sometimes other men are overwhelmingly men. It brings me some sense of relief that as a society we are at a place where we can name the problem properly. I am finally seeing references to combating men’s violence, although it is still not present enough in the reporting.

I refer to Assistant Commissioner Wurst’s statements after the alleged murder of a Lajamanu woman this week. He said:

What we’re dealing with here is another tragedy, another tragedy for the Northern Territory, another tragedy for the community ...