

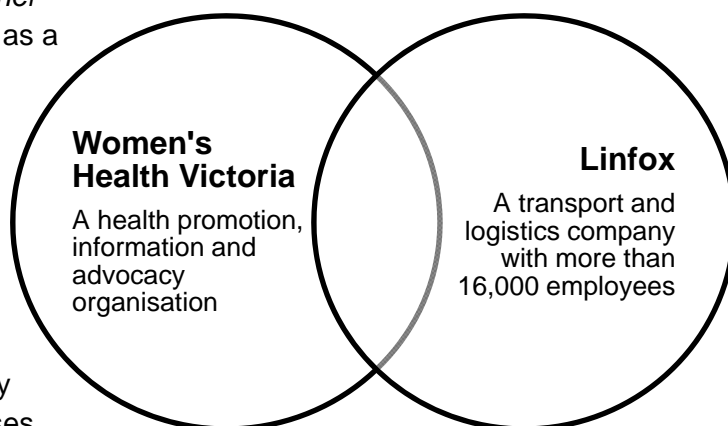
Women's Health Victoria

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: *Working Together Against Violence*

History of the *Working Together Against Violence* project

Violence against women is a serious and pervasive issue that affects individuals, families and the wider community, including workplaces. Addressing the causes of violence through primary prevention activity is becoming increasingly necessary.

Women's Health Victoria's *Working Together Against Violence* project used workplaces as a setting for the primary prevention of violence against women. The project aimed to strengthen the organisational capacity of a male-dominated workplace to promote gender equality and non-violent norms. That workplace was Linfox.



Funded by VicHealth and comprehensively evaluated, the project comprised two phases spanning four years, from 2007 to 2011.

It's been warming to see this come into an environment like this where we're blokes. ... Some of us have been around a long time and we've never had this opportunity.

Training participant

Theoretical grounding

Work to prevent violence against women must occur at an individual, organisational and societal level. The ecological approach to understanding violence, set out in VicHealth's framework, *Preventing violence before it occurs*, provided the grounding for the project.² The project was also informed by theories of masculinity, organisational culture theory, social norms theory and the bystander approach to violence prevention.

At a societal level, theories of masculinity were used to understand the context in which violence against women occurs. Organisational culture and change theory influenced understandings of workplace health promotion. Social norms theory overlaid these theories, informing efforts to prevent violence against women at an individual, organisational and societal level by examining how the norms that shape behaviour can be changed. The bystander approach provided Women's Health Victoria with the means to implement the theory in a male-dominated environment. *Working Together Against Violence* built the capacity of employees,

We know we're not going to transform, overnight or over many decades, certain structures of male power and privilege that have developed over thousands of years. Nevertheless, how are we going to bring more men – many more men – into a conversation about sexism and violence against women? And how are we going to do this without turning them off, without berating them, without blaming them for centuries of sexist oppression?

Jackson Katz
The Macho Paradox

particularly men, to challenge violence-supportive attitudes and behaviours. It was reinforced by strategies across all elements of the ecological approach to understanding violence.

About *Take a stand against domestic violence. It's everyone's business*

Using this theoretical grounding and the evidence collected at Linfox, a workplace program was developed – *Take a stand against domestic violence. It's everyone's business*.

Take a stand against domestic violence. It's everyone's business is a whole-of-company program that addresses the prevention of domestic violence at a range of levels within a workplace. It is premised on the understanding that the health and safety of employees at home affects their health and safety at work. It is informed by the following concepts:

- Primary prevention – *Take a stand* aims to prevent violence before it occurs by focusing on the determinants of violence against women.²
- Bystander approach – *Take a stand* engages and encourages men and women to stand up against violence against women.¹
- Whole-of-company approach – *Take a stand* addresses all staff, systems, and levels of a company.³

Essentially, *Take a stand* helps companies prevent domestic violence before it occurs and support staff who might be experiencing it. This is achieved through three key elements – leadership, training and message promotion. Together, these three elements can create a workplace that does not tolerate violence. *Take a stand* was fully conceptualised and introduced into Linfox in March 2010.

I think we've had the advantage of growing with (Women's Health Victoria) and the project. Going into a new business – I think Women's Health Victoria are good communicators. The fact that you are so flexible is helpful and that you do hear what a business is telling you. That's the most important part.

Senior Head Office Contact,
Linfox

Engaging Linfox

The engagement process was fundamentally about building a relationship. Successfully navigating the relationship between a community organisation and a for-profit company is vital. For Women's Health Victoria, this was a new way of working, and the project represented, in part, a process of understanding the expectations of the corporate sector and negotiating effective ways of working together.

Engagement occurred again and again as the project moved through diverse parts of the company, intersected with different employees, and implemented a range of primary prevention strategies.

Women’s Health Victoria was able to engage with Linfox on an ongoing basis through listening to concerns and responding to them. This included using language that Linfox felt comfortable with. Linfox initially decided on *Harm in the Home* instead of more direct language around domestic violence. As a relationship of trust was developed, the language was able to change to ‘domestic violence’, as used in *Take a stand against domestic violence. It’s everyone’s business*. This was an important learning process for Women’s Health Victoria. Listening to Linfox’s concerns enabled the project to proceed beyond its early stages.

It shows that as a company, we stand up against violence in the workplace and against domestic violence, that we are a caring employer. Employees can discuss stories with each other, ways to help each other out, bring everyone together and work together as a team.

Take a stand *Contact, Linfox*

Implementing *Take a stand against domestic violence*

Using workplaces as a setting for the primary prevention of violence against women is an emerging area of practice.⁴ Linfox’s perspective and support all provided Women’s Health Victoria with an invaluable learning experience.

Indirect, intangible things, like a happier workforce, better productivity and less leave because of disenchantment. The training has a flow on effect. Workers are more conscientious and the efforts you put in come back to you.

Worksite manager’s views on the benefits of the training

Linfox’s agreement to the project itself, and then to *Take a stand* in 2010, is evidence of their leadership in this area. Other signifiers of Linfox’s commitment to violence prevention were the fact that training was provided on paid time. Many worksite managers also made the training compulsory. A *Take a stand Contact* was nominated by head office, further signalling Linfox’s support for the program.

The bystander approach, used as the theoretical underpinning of the *Take a stand* training, was vital in gaining support for the project among managers and employees. It encouraged individuals to stand up against violence-supportive attitudes and behaviours. Importantly, it regarded men not as perpetrators, but as individuals who can make a difference. A program in which men felt targeted, or one that was more confrontational, would not have gained traction in a male-dominated company. The bystander approach was therefore key to the take up of the program, and the receptiveness of employees in training. In total, 515 employees participated in the training, across 11 Victorian worksites.

- Eighty seven percent felt that the training helped them gain a better understanding of domestic violence.
- Eighty seven percent of participants felt that the training helped them understand how things people say or do can support domestic violence.

- Eighty nine percent of participants felt that they were very likely or quite likely to speak out against domestic violence as a result of the training.

Findings also showed that participants felt they were more likely to challenge violence-supportive attitudes and behaviours as a result of the training, and understood how sexism occurs on a continuum of violence against women. Almost all participants felt that the training should be provided more widely. For the majority of focus group participants, the training had changed the way they thought about domestic violence and what they could do about it.

Guys know now that they can approach management with personal issues. The guys know that Linfox cares about them as individuals.

Linfox worksite manager

Following the *Take a stand* training, 95 percent of participants were happy or very happy that Linfox was working with a not for-profit organisation to prevent domestic violence.

Next steps

Women's Health Victoria learnt much about what is effective in engaging a company in the prevention of domestic violence, as well as what works in embedding and sustaining this work. The findings of this report make a valuable contribution to the evidence base for the primary prevention of violence against women using workplaces as the setting.

Yeah, it is a good idea that Linfox is doing this. There are people that know people that do it and they might learn something from this and as a friend can say something. I've said to a friend 'why are you talking to your wife like that?'

Focus group participant

In looking to the future:

- Women's Health Victoria will be developing a resource guide and training to share what has been learnt with organisations that want to work with the corporate sector to prevent violence against women.
- Women's Health Victoria will seek to implement the *Take a stand against domestic violence* program in other companies so that more workplaces join in the primary prevention of violence against women.

The final report is available at <http://whv.org.au/publications-resources/publications-resources-by-topic/post/working-together-against-violence-final-project-report/>.