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Australian police perceptions of women's police stations

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Abstract

Women's police stations that are designed to receive victims of gender-based violence first emerged in Latin America in the 1980s. In Argentina, these stations have unique aspects like multidisciplinary staffing that could guide responses elsewhere. Police responses to domestic and family violence (DFV) in Australia have continually failed victims and require much improvement. Responses combining police and other services are not completely alien to Australia, and are not too dissimilar from women's police stations. We undertook a survey of Australian police ($n=78$) to assess which aspects of Argentina's stations could inform new approaches to DFV policing. Our survey finds that Australian police support some aspects of this approach to policing DFV, such as multidisciplinary stations (74%). There was significantly less support for stations staffed predominantly by women (19%). Combined with review of evaluations of Australian co-locational responses, research implications for practice suggest a broader trial of co-locational responses in Australia.

Keywords: Australia; co-locational policing; policing domestic and family violence; policing gender-based violence; women's police stations

Introduction

Gender-based violence is 'one of the most significant issues to be addressed in our time' (United Nations Women 2015: 8)¹. In this context, domestic and family violence (DFV) is a substantial issue. Data from the 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Personal Safety Survey shows that 17% of Australian women, aged 15 and over, have experienced intimate partner violence from a current or former partner (ABS 2017b). On average one woman is killed every week in Australia by a partner or former partner (ABS 2021). Rates of intimate partner homicide for women have remained fairly static over the last decade (Bricknell and Doherty 2021). Yet less than a third of women who have experienced violence from a current or former partner have reported it to the police (ABS 2017a). For Indigenous women the

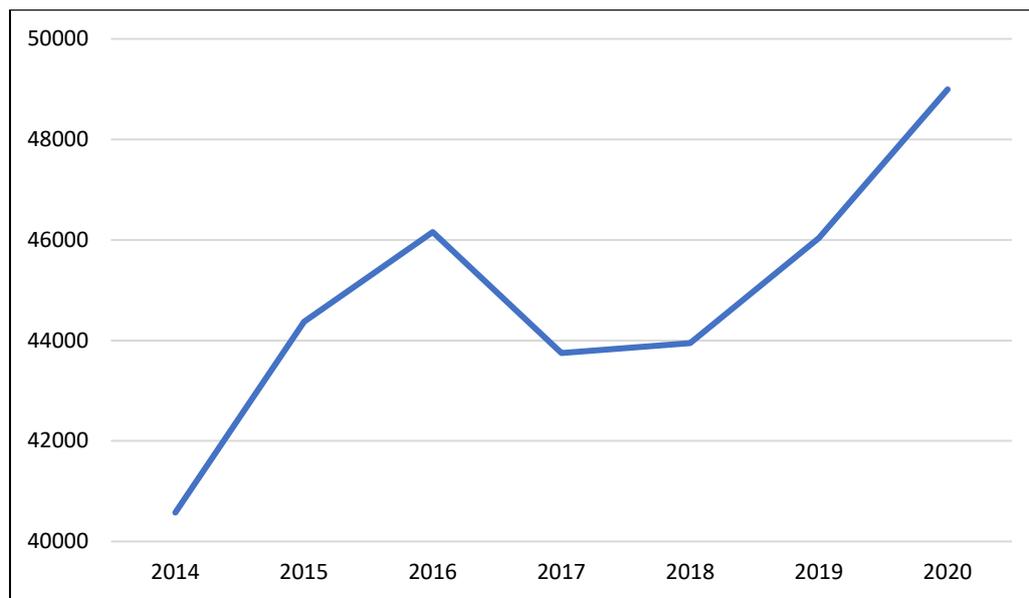
¹ Throughout, we mostly mean domestic and family violence when referring to 'gender-based violence'. This can include sexual violence. The women's police stations in Argentina and Brazil respond to all forms of gender-based violence and when these are discussed 'gender-based violence' refers to all forms. Any use of other terminology is reflective of the cited source being discussed.

proportion is much lower, with only one in ten reporting DFV to the police (Community Development and Justice Standing Committee 2020).

Police are often the first responders to DFV (Royal Commission 2016: 1). In most countries, the bulk of government funding for responding to DFV goes to the courts and policing. In the United States, 85% of annual federal government funding for intimate partner violence is directed to the criminal legal system (Goodmark 2021). Yet, policing DFV is not proving effective, and the lack of reporting is unsurprising. Studies and government inquiries have found that police in Australia have continually failed victims of DFV (Douglas and Fitzgerald 2018; Nancarrow 2019; NSW Team 2019: 132-133; Royal Commission 2016: 382-388; Special Taskforce 2015: 230; Standing Committee on Social Issues 2012: 167). Similar findings are evident elsewhere in Global North, such as the United States (Gruba 2020), England and Wales (Walklate et al. 2020), Canada (Barret et al. 2019), Italy (Arcidiacono and Crocitti 2015), and Germany (Greuel et al. 2010).

In Australia, rates of female victimisation for domestic assault have been steadily increasing (Figure 1).

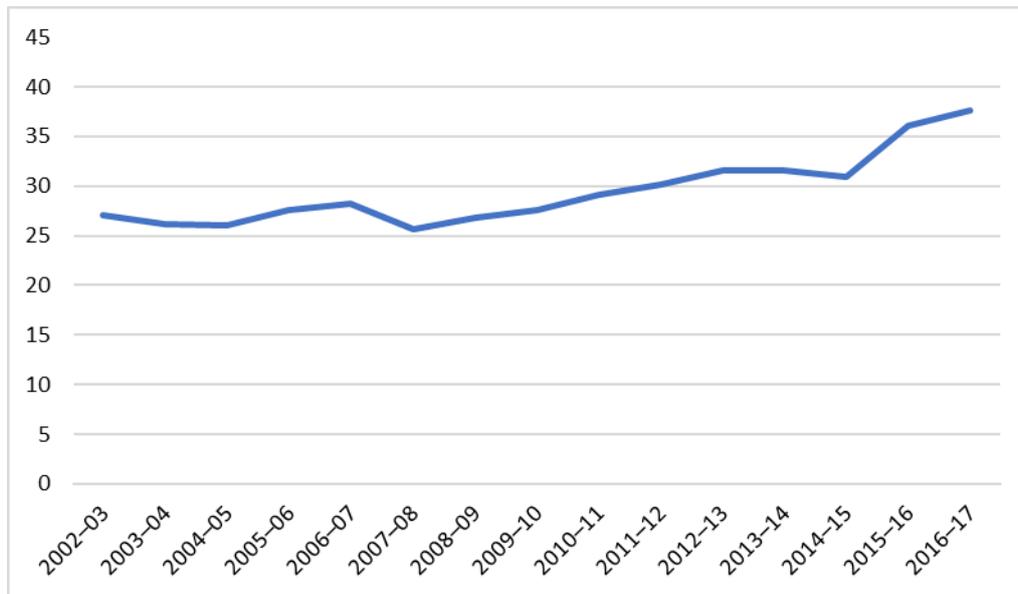
Figure 1 Female victims of family and domestic violence-related assaults, Australia, 2014-2020. Note: Data not included for Victoria or Queensland.



Source: (ABS 2021)

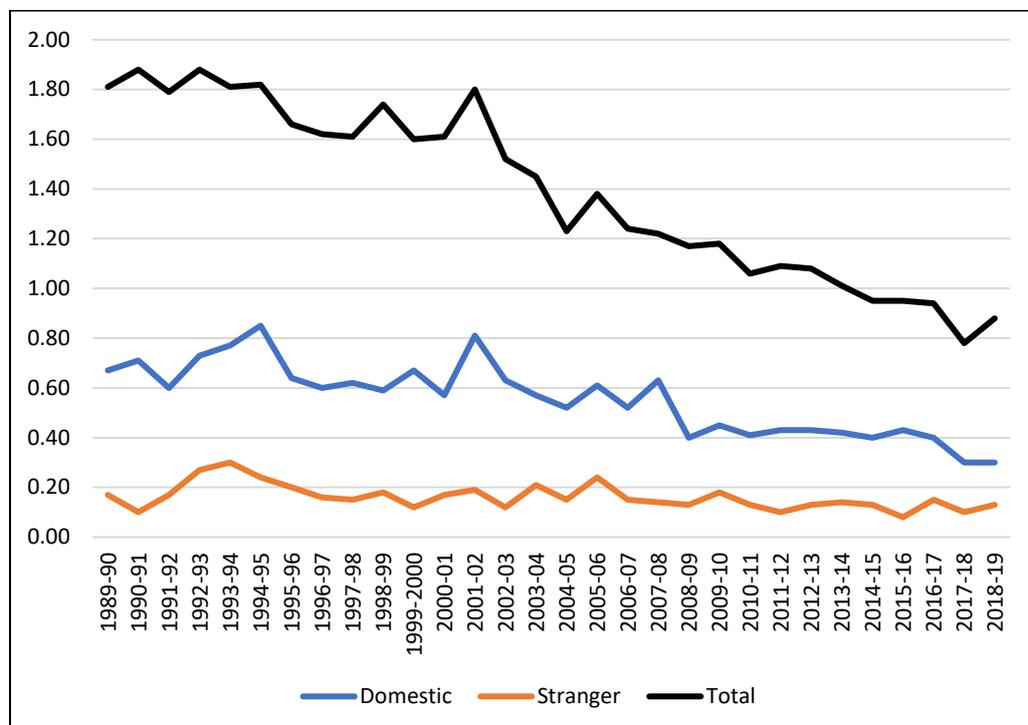
Growth in reporting could account for some of these increases, but further data analysis debunks that argument. First, women's rates of hospitalisation for injuries sustained from domestic violence have increased for decades (Figure 2; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2019). Second, although total homicide rates have been declining for three decades, rates of *domestic homicide* only began to decline in 2009 (Figure 3), and still account for two thirds of all homicides of women (Bricknell 2020).

Figure 2 Age-standardised rate of hospitalisation for women assaulted by a partner 2002-2003 to 2016-2017.



Source: (AIHW 2019).

Figure 3 Homicide rate per 100,000 people by type, Australia, 1989-90 to 2018-19. Note: 2018-19 excludes Australian Capital Territory.



Source: (Australian Institute of Criminology 2019).

Police units supported by multidisciplinary workers may enhance the secondary and tertiary prevention of DFV (Amaral et al. 2018; Carrington et al. 2020; Hamilton et al. 2021; Hautzinger 2007; Mundy and Seuffert 2021). Yet, most research on policing DFV and how violence

prevention might work has come from studies of services in large cities of the Global North (Arango et al. 2014; Walklate and Fitz-Gibbon 2018). Our project aimed to address this gap by studying what could be learnt from Argentina's women's police stations (WPS), *Comisaría de la Mujer y la Familia*, in the Province of Buenos Aires (PBA). We have reported on this (Carrington et al. 2019, 2020) and provide a summary below. PBA has one of the lowest rates of femicide in Latin America and Argentina ranks higher than Australia for gender equity (Carrington et al. 2020: 60, 2021b: 16). Our project then investigated what practical aspects of Argentina's WPS could enhance the policing of DFV in Australia. Police receptiveness is critical to any change in police practice, and it has implications for their day-to-day work. This article thus presents the findings of an Australian survey exploring police perceptions of strategies used by WPS.

In this article, we define co-locational responses as a single service delivery where victims can seek help from one or more services at the location with police being one service available at the location.² Much like Argentina's stations, these models enable a cohesive response to violence in a single location. There is limited available evaluation of co-locational responses in Australia, and further investigation is needed to determine if other Australian police are open to such models. These models could include WPS designed specifically to receive victims of gender-based violence, which currently only exist in the Global South. This is the first study of its kind in Australia, adding new knowledge about police perceptions of operational dimensions of WPS. Framed by Southern criminology, the project reverses the usual logic of looking to the Global North for exemplars to innovate police practices (Carrington et al. 2016).

After contextualising the policing of DFV in Australia, we discuss a range of co-located responses involving police and review the limited evaluations of these in Australia. We then summarise others' work on WPS in the Global South and our findings of the unique aspects of Argentina's stations, which inform our survey. We present the methodology for our survey, then our results and discussion. Combining our survey findings with others' evaluations of co-located responses in Australia, we argue that Australian police respondents support some aspects of this victim-centric approach to policing domestic and family violence.

Australian domestic and family violence policing context

Police have a significant role in the frontline response to DFV; contact with police is often a victim's first contact with the criminal legal system, and the broader system of services and support (Royal Commission 2016: 1; Special Taskforce 2015: 251). In Australia, police responses to DFV are supported by a range of laws and requirements often grouped under state family violence protection acts (names varying across states). These acts recognise the diverse forms DFV can take and are not limited to physical assault. Australia does not have mandatory arrest in cases of suspected DFV but does have a 'pro arrest' approach in many jurisdictions, where police are encouraged to arrest and charge if they believe a criminal offence has occurred (see, for example, Victoria Police [VicPol] 2020b: 5). Police can apply for various protection orders, along with ouster orders and bail conditions to protect victims. Victims can also apply for civil protection orders. Breaches of protection orders are a criminal

² Other collaborative responses involving police include co-responder models (for example, Reuland et al. 2006) or high risk teams (for example, Hamilton et al., 2021).

offence (Stubbs and Wangmann 2017). Systems are enabled for police to make referrals to support services for victims, but this form of support connection has various levels of efficacy due to service caseloads, system information limitations, and victim service refusal (Diemer et al., 2017: 345; Queensland Police Service (QPS) 2021: 11). Regardless of policies, discretion largely informs the response an individual will receive when seeking police assistance amounting in the inconsistent, flawed and harmful experiences cited above. Death reviews and reports identified that positive and appropriate police responses may save lives (Domestic and Family Violence Death Review and Advisory Board 2017: 23; NSW Team 2019: 132-133; Special Taskforce 2015: 12).

DFV is a substantial portion of policing work with Australian frontline estimates reporting that DFV takes up 40%-70% of police on duty time (Garcia 2021; NSW Committee 2021; The Police Association of Victoria 2015). A single attendance averages 2.5-3 hours (Queensland Government Statistician's Office 2021), increasing to 3.5-4 hours including paperwork (The Police Association of Victoria 2015). DFV policing and legal reforms have expanded police role and responsibility increasing the time spent on each call out and resulting in significant triaging of call outs due to chronic understaffing (Queensland Government Statistician's Office 2021; The Police Association of Victoria 2015). There are specialist domestic violence units, teams or liaison officers in all jurisdictions, but these roles may be vastly understaffed (Carrington et al. 2021a: 24) with limited capacity to provide support to colleagues, let alone every person seeking help. High risk teams involving police, DFV workers, child protection agencies and services, mental health agencies, corrections, state housing agencies, and drug and alcohol services may collaborate for identified cases, but these are not the majority and not all high risk cases get recognised as such. Broadly, policing DFV involves police taking on a joint social work and police role, requiring victim support, conflict mediation, and conducting investigation (Maple and Kebbell 2020). Focusing on criminal legal outcomes can sideline the autonomy and safety of women (Seuffert and Mundy 2020), and harmful impacts of a limited criminal legal focus have been widely documented in Australia and beyond (see, for example, Douglas and Fitzgerald 2018; Gruba 2020; Nancarrow 2019).

A key context in policing DFV in Australia is the experiences of Indigenous women who are five times more likely to experience DFV, 32 times more likely to be hospitalised from that violence and twice as likely to be killed as the result of domestic homicide compared to non-Indigenous women (AIHW 2019: 10). Indigenous women have lower DFV reporting rates and are more likely to be misidentified as perpetrators (Douglas and Fitzgerald, 2018; Nancarrow, 2019). In the early days of settler colonisation, policing played a key role in the control and genocide of Indigenous people, and has shaped present-day relations (Asquith and Bartkowiak-Théron 2021; Owen 2016). The colonial context continues to shape policing and the defining features of genocide and structural racism remain; continued harm and over-policing proliferate (Porter and Cunneen 2021). Given this, police presence is often not welcomed in discrete Indigenous communities,³ and police are often seen as symbols of white authority and oppression (Dwyer et al. 2021; Whellum et al. 2020). Indigenous people may view state sponsored order and justice as illegitimate and inappropriate (Gregoire and Porter 2021; Nancarrow 2019), and may have no interest in engaging state responses and risking

³ Dwyer et al. (2021) state 'Discrete Indigenous communities are defined as areas "that are bounded geographical locations inhabited predominantly by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with housing or infrastructure owned or managed on a community basis"' (p. 221).

further harm. These complexities are intensified as policing in discrete Indigenous communities dominantly involves outsiders who do not stay long and are 'not trained nor prepared for policing in these distinct contexts' (Dwyer et al., 2021: 210). In addition, the majority of police are not Indigenous (averaging 2%) (Australian Federal Police (AFP) 2020; Victoria Police (VicPol) 2020a; Western Australian (WA) Police Force 2020).

Co-locational responses to domestic and family violence involving police

Dealing with vulnerability is core to policing work, rather than a rare and isolated occurrence (Asquith and Bartkowiak-Théron 2021), and thus multidisciplinary service delivery is critical. Responding to DFV is not something police can do alone, and they acknowledge the need to work with relevant organisations and services to act effectively (Mundy and Seuffert 2021; QPS 2021; The Police Association of Victoria 2015). Cohesive multidisciplinary work is critical for victim-centric DFV response (Chung et al. 2018). Co-located responses are one multidisciplinary model to support victims and policing that has been trialled in Australia. These may take the form of one or many workers from one or several services based in police stations; or one or many services, including DFV police, based at a different location (for example, Mikakos 2018; Mundy and Seuffert 2021). Workers in these services usually provide crisis support, support in reporting to police, connect victims with external services, and help victims understand their legal options and the related steps.

Of the few co-located responses have been previously piloted in Australia, we draw on limited available evaluations to demonstrate the Australian police perspectives of these victim-centric multidisciplinary responses. These models are: a single victim-support project officer located in a police station, Tamworth, New South Wales (NSW) (Wangmann 2003 in Breckenridge et al. 2016); an entire support organisation located in a police station, Nowra, NSW (current) (Mundy and Seuffert 2021; Seuffert and Mundy 2020); and a multidisciplinary hub which includes several support and government services and police, Perth, Western Australia (O'Connor and Fisher 2005 in Breckenridge et al. 2016).

These evaluations reported a range of benefits from the police perspective. For police, collaborating with DFV and multidisciplinary workers aided the sharing of information, ideas, and resources. This introduced efficiency and increased accountability. Both police and multidisciplinary workers reported learning. The Tamworth trial found a more comprehensive understanding of DFV obtained for individual case records across 73% of cases (Wangmann 2003 in Breckenridge et al. 2016). Across the evaluations, officers appreciated access and support from support workers who had more experience providing emotional and service connection support.

Traditionally police have tended to think, this is policing, this is criminal justice, this is care bear stuff, this is for the social workers and the counsellors and all that kind of stuff and never the twain shall meet. ... police don't have the expertise or the time or whatever. But the interface between those two roles needs to be amiable, not conflicted. (Police officer in Mundy and Seuffert 2021: 5)

Not having to spend the time on support amounted to improvements in the depth and quality of policing with police being able to devote time to cases, viewing DFV more holistically. Challenges included clashes of workplace cultures, lack of clarity around roles and authority, and hesitance to share information. However, evaluations also cite overcoming some of these early challenges.

Police legitimacy was discussed across evaluations, with police station-based models being inappropriate for groups who distrust police, such as Indigenous Australian women. This was an issue for all models with such cohorts being unlikely to engage with services that share locations with police.

Aboriginal women don't—there are just a lot of trust issues with police. They're scared that the police are involved so [state child welfare agency] are going to be involved and we've always said that it would hinder people attending. (DFV worker in Mundy and Seuffert 2021: 5)

However, improvements in knowledge, understanding, service delivery, investigation and accountability aided improvements in police legitimacy 'breaking down negative perceptions of police; add[ing] credibility to the police response; and it may assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to contact police' (Wangmann 2003 in Breckenridge et al. 2016: 9). Generally, evaluations of sexual assault co-locational responses in Australia report similarly positive police experiences (for example, Darkwinkel 2014; Worth 2016).

Multidisciplinary Centres (MDCs) are one current holistic response in Victoria, Australia. Unfortunately, there is a lack of evaluation and scholarly literature on the three MDCs that include DFV. Royal Commission documents (for example, Barwon Area Integrated Family Violence Committee 2015; McWhirter 2015; Royal Commission 2016: 258) and other VicPol documents (for example, VicPol 2021) indicate that there is broad support from police and workers at the MDCs, and from police management. A Freedom of Information request to VicPol revealed that an extensive evaluation of MDCs is complete but yet to be reviewed by police leadership and stakeholders. It is unclear if findings of this evaluation will be made publicly available. In Queensland, single DFV workers located in police stations currently occurs in some regions (QPS 2021), and an evaluation for one of these stations is pending publication (Rodgers et al. forthcoming). Evidence from limited existing and former trials shows police support of for co-locational responses in the Australian context. Practice success in Australia supports the case for replication due to similar legal, cultural and organisational contexts across jurisdictions. Further investigation is needed to see if other Australian police are open to these and different forms of co-located response, such as WPS.

Beyond the police perspective and outside of these limited trials and models in place, the benefits of co-locational approaches have been recognised in Australia. The NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team (NSW Team 2019) recommended that the issues with police responses when victims report to stations could be addressed, and responses generally enhanced, by the inclusion of DFV services at police stations. The NSW Parliament Select Committee into Coercive Control (2021) made a similar recommendation. Research by Women's Safety NSW (Foster et al. 2020) found that 98% of clients agreed that support workers should be co-located at stations to support those reporting to police.

Elsewhere, co-location has been found to be effective in improving DFV policing. A review from the United Kingdom reported that daily contact with police enabled DFV support workers

to influence police understanding and practice long term (Coy and Kelly 2011: 17). In Canada, police reported that having staff to provide emotional support, information and advocacy freed up time for core policing and investigation (Eyre 2017). Police also welcomed the effective and timely communication benefits of co-location (Eyre 2017). In the United States, Women's Justice Centres are another co-locational response offering holistic services, including government services. However, they risk amplifying harm due to extensive US mandatory arrest and reporting requirements (Piehowski 2020). Emerging from the Global South, women's police stations are a unique form of co-locational response worthy of closer attention.

Women's police stations

The first women's police station designed explicitly to respond to all types of gender-based violence emerged in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1985 (Hautzinger 2002). As WPS have been around for some time there is longitudinal data demonstrating their efficacy. A study in Brazil assessed shifts in female homicide rates in 2,074 municipalities from 2004-2009 (Perova and Reynolds 2017). Where WPS were present the female homicide rate dropped by 17% for all women, but for women aged 15-24 in metropolitan areas the reduction was 50% (or 5.57 deaths reduction per 100,000) (Perova and Reynolds 2017: 193-194). However, homicide reductions favoured white women (Arvate et al. 2021), pointing to broader structural and systemic issues impacting DFV experiences and access to justice.

In Peru, Kavanaugh et al. (2018) found a 7% decrease in incidence of intimate femicides in districts with a women's justice centre (in Peru, these are primarily staffed by women police officers and co-located with lawyers and medical staff). The largest decrease was for women aged 20-39 years old; this is particularly significant as 40% of reported cases were from women between 25-45 years (Kavanaugh et al. 2018). Natarajan and Babu (2020) examined the relationships between the presence of WPS in India, various crimes against women and the numbers of women police across India. They found a statistically significant decrease in dowry deaths (murders of women by partners or in-laws over dowry disputes) in locations with WPS. Growing research suggests WPS enhance willingness to report, preventing further harm (for example, Gomes and Avellaneda 2021; Hautzinger 2002; Jubb et al. 2010; Natarajan 2005; Pasinato 2016), while enhancing police legitimacy (Córdova and Kras 2020a). Their presence also promotes attitudes from men that condemn violence against women, potentially translating to further reduced violence (Córdova and Kras 2020b).

In Argentina, the first of these stations was established in the city of La Plata in 1988 (Carrington et al. 2020: 44-45). In 2018-2019, our team (see acknowledgements) conducted field research for three months interviewing 100 employees from 10 WPS located in different cities of the PBA across 2500 km. Argentina's stations offer aspects that could enhance the policing of DFV in Australia, and we investigate Australian police perceptions of these features in our survey. For context, we overview these stations. We found that these stations approach the policing and prevention of gender-based violence in three main ways. Focusing on the tertiary and secondary prevention of gender-based violence: they work with victims and perpetrators to prevent re-victimisation and offer an emergency response; and work through local boards with other municipal and provincial agencies, such as gender policy units, to identify and prevent high risk cases from ending in femicide. They also pursue a primary prevention strategy through the large-scale educative influence of their community

engagement activities, which challenge the norms that sustain violence against women (Carrington et al. 2020). The stations provide a family friendly welcoming environment, differing from the sparse and sterile environment of a traditional police station (see [Images 1-4](#)). Limitations stem from shortages of human and material resources.

Argentina's stations feature elements not present in Brazil and provide interesting possibilities to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. While police in Argentina's stations conduct investigations, process domestic violence cases and restraining orders, this comprises only around a third of their work; unlike the police at the stations in Brazil that are completely devoted to this task. In Brazil, multidisciplinary teams and support services are not legislated and are less successfully implemented (da Silva and Bini 2021; Souza and Faria 2017). Argentina's primary prevention work undertaken by police and the work of support staff with perpetrators are also unique factors.

Figures for the end of 2018 show 128 stand-alone stations in the PBA and 16 offices located within existing government departments. At this time, they employed 2300 officers working alongside multidisciplinary team members and responding to around 250,000 complaints of DFV per year. Since 2006, officers at Argentina's stations are not limited to women, and men now comprise around 10% of police in these specialist stations. However, everyone who works at the station must have specialist training and operate from a gender perspective that views DFV as a cycle. Women's police stations provide one way to ensure holistic and effective policing of DFV while minimising some of the harms of criminalisation, such as the removal of the victim's agency.

Methodology

In the context of the unique elements of Argentina's stations in responding to preventing gender-based violence, evidence showing the success of Brazil's stations, and the chronic failings of current Australian police responses to DFV, we wanted to know which elements of Argentina's stations could enhance the policing of DFV in Australia. We undertook a Qualtrics survey to seek the informed views of key stakeholders in the Australian DFV sector, and used a purposive sampling strategy to recruit information-rich respondents. All eight of Australia's state and territory police services were formally approached to participate. Only three were successful: Tasmania Police, WA Police Force, and Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Policing. Email invitations were distributed to police officers in these states, non-governmental organisations, researchers, and 85 government-funded peak bodies and agencies in sexual violence and DFV across Australia. The sexual violence sector was included as often organisations respond to both forms of violence, and DFV can include sexual violence. Police contacts distributed the survey email invitation and link to officers in DFV units, teams and liaison officers with the survey intake information targeting those 'in the violence prevention and/or intervention sector'. Email invitations included a link to share the survey with others, thus police may have received and undertaken the survey without being officers in DFV units, teams or liaison officers. The survey was open from 12 March to 26 October, 2019. A total of 344 participants completed the survey, but responses were excluded if incomplete. Thus 277 participants were included in the analysis. The original empirical data for this article focuses on the 78 respondents who identified their vocation as a 'Police Officer'. The average survey duration for police respondents was 9 minutes and 47 seconds.

Respondents were asked their socio-demographics, then a series of questions about their work, research and specialist training. The term 'gender violence' was used throughout survey questions, but most station aspects and qualitative responses reflect a DFV focus. Key questions asked respondents: which aspects of Argentina's stations could improve how Australian police stations respond to victims of gender violence; perceptions about how police should ideally respond to victims of gender violence; and opinions on appropriate staffing for WPS in Indigenous communities. The survey concluded by asking respondents an open-ended question on ideas about how to prevent gender violence, resulting in 133 responses (18 from police officers).

Descriptive statistics were calculated using Excel. Given the gendered nature of policing (male dominated) and DFV (majority women victims with male offenders), we conducted statistical tests of group difference to identify statistically significant differences between responses from male and female police. The tests conducted were Chi squares, with Bonferroni correction where multiple tests were undertaken, to control for type I error rates. Statistical tests of group difference were also conducted comparing Police to Workforce cohorts. These demonstrate differences and similarities between the groups and highlight the sometimes unique nature of police responses. A number of statistical tests were unable to be undertaken for the second and third key question due to lack of response and low cell counts.

Qualitative data was thematically coded by one author using NVivo. One author cross-checked the emerging thematic framework and provided feedback to aid development. Themes were identified through inductive coding, typical of exploratory qualitative research seeking to discover new theories, concepts or modes of interpretation (Silverman 2011), and deductive coding informed by our expertise on the subject. The automatic counting tools in NVivo were then used to tally the most common themes.

Respondent socio-demographics

Of the 78 police respondents, 53.8% were Male ($n=42$) and 46.2% ($n=36$) Female (see Table 1). As women represent on average around 30% of sworn officers in Australian state police services, responses from women police officers were over-represented (see Carrington et al. 2019 for figures by jurisdiction). This proportion is not unexpected in the context of DFV specialism. Of these police respondents, 2.6% ($n=2$) were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This figure is representative of the reported 2% average of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander sworn officers in ACT, Victoria and WA (AFP 2020; VicPol 2020a; WA Police Force 2020). The representativeness of the police respondent's geographic location mostly aligns with the jurisdictions where the state police services agreed to participate. Duration of time as a police officer was prominent at both ends of the spectrum with equal numbers of respondents in the highest and lowest range ($n=20$ 0-3 years, 15+ years). Overall, respondents were located at the lower end of work experience with 57% ($n=44$) between 0-8 years. While this cohort may be naïve about many aspects of DFV, in some ways this is an ideal cohort as frontline officers deal with the bulk of DFV cases and their receptiveness is critical for success in practice implementation.

Table 1 Socio-demographics of the Workforce survey compared to Australian Census (n=277)

Demographics	Police Officers		Remaining Workforce		ABS Data June 2019
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	%
Total	78	28.2%	199	71.8%	25,364,307
Gender					
Male	42	53.8%	23	11.6%	49.6%
Female	36	46.2%	175	87.9%	50.4%
Other	0	0%	1	0.5%	N/A
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background					798,365
Yes	2	2.6%	9	4.5%	3.1%
No	76	97.4%	190	95.5%	
Australian Residence					
Western Australia	36	46.2%	17	8.5%	10.3%
Australian Capital Territory	25	32.1%	6	3.0%	1.7%
New South Wales	5	6.4%	52	26.1%	31.9%
Tasmania	5	6.4%	7	3.5%	2.1%
Northern Territory	4	5.1%	12	6.0%	1.0%
Queensland	2	2.6%	80	40.2%	20.1%
South Australia	1	1.3%	2	1.0%	6.9%
Victoria	0	0.0%	23	11.6%	26.0%
Age Group (years)					
18-30	11	14.1%	22	11.1%	18.5%
31-40	20	25.6%	39	19.6%	14.3%
41-50	29	37.2%	54	27.1%	12.9%
51-60	18	23.1%	51	25.6%	12.0%
61-70	0	0%	28	14.1%	10.0%
70+	0	0%	5	2.5%	10.2%
Years in this or similar role					
0-3 years	20	26%	26	33%	
3-5 years	10	13%	18	23%	
6-8 years	14	18%	16	21%	
9-11 years	7	9%	8	10%	
12-15 years	7	9%	7	9%	
15+ years	20	26%	29	37%	

Source: (ABS 2019)

Results

Women's police stations and improving Australian responses

The first key question asked respondents 'In your opinion, which aspects of women's police stations could improve how Australian police stations respond to victims of gender violence?' There were 12 aspects provided, based on our findings about WPS in Argentina, and

respondents were able to choose more than one response. More than 50% of police selected nine of the aspects (Figure 4). The most endorsed aspect by police respondents was for police stations to work in multidisciplinary teams with lawyers, counsellors and social workers (74%,⁴ n=58). Statistically significant differences were found between police and the remaining cohort for the majority (9 of 12) of the aspects. Values are reported in Table 2.

Figure 4 Which of the following aspects of women's police stations could improve how Australian police stations respond to victims of gender violence? (Police responses compared to remaining Workforce)

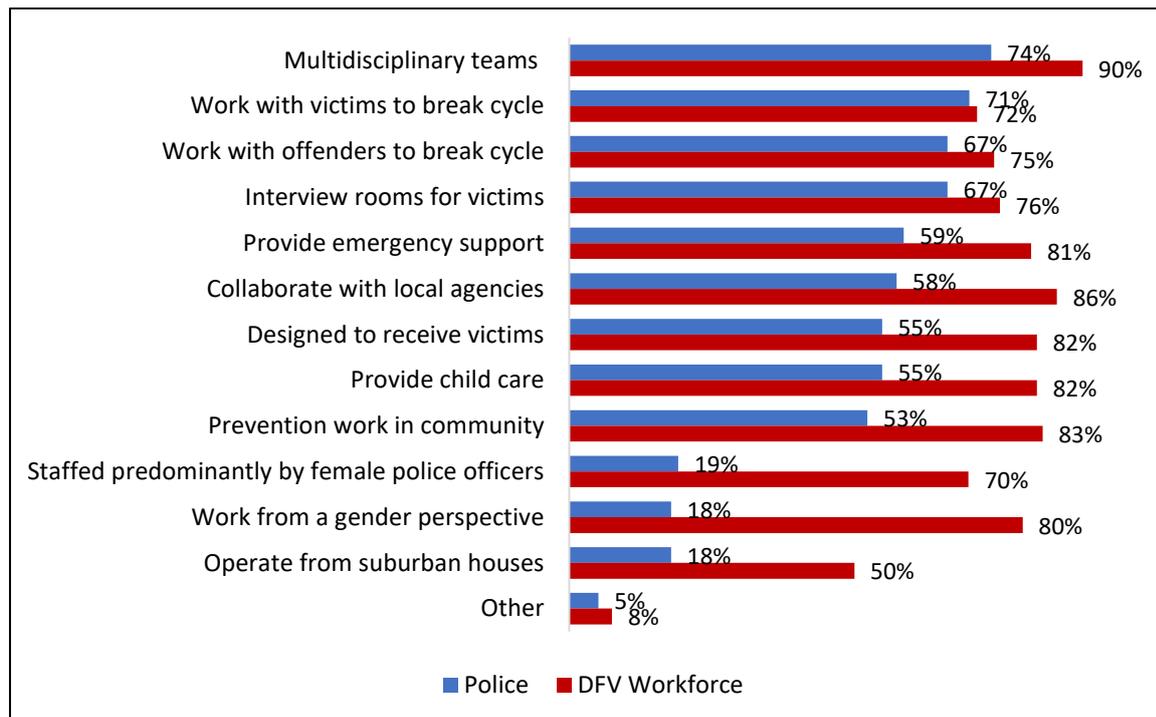


Table 2 Statistical significance between cohorts for station aspects

Station aspect	Chi square	df	p value	Bonferroni correction, significant at .006
Police Stations that work from a gender perspective	93.0076	1	0.00001	yes
Police Stations staffed predominantly by female police officers	60.2236	1	0.00001	yes
Police stations that operate from houses in the suburbs	24.4636	1	0.00001	yes
Police Stations that carry out violence prevention work in the local community	29.1893	1	0.00001	yes
Police Stations that collaborate with local agencies to prevent gender violence	27.0371	1	0.00001	yes
Police Stations specifically designed to receive victims	22.8987	1	0.00001	yes
Police Stations that provide child care and a space for children	22.8987	1	0.00001	yes
Police Stations that provide emergency support to victims of violence	15.7266	1	0.000073	yes
Police Stations that work in multidisciplinary teams with lawyers, counsellors and social workers	12.9095	1	0.000327	yes

⁴ Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Ideal police responses to victims of gender-based violence

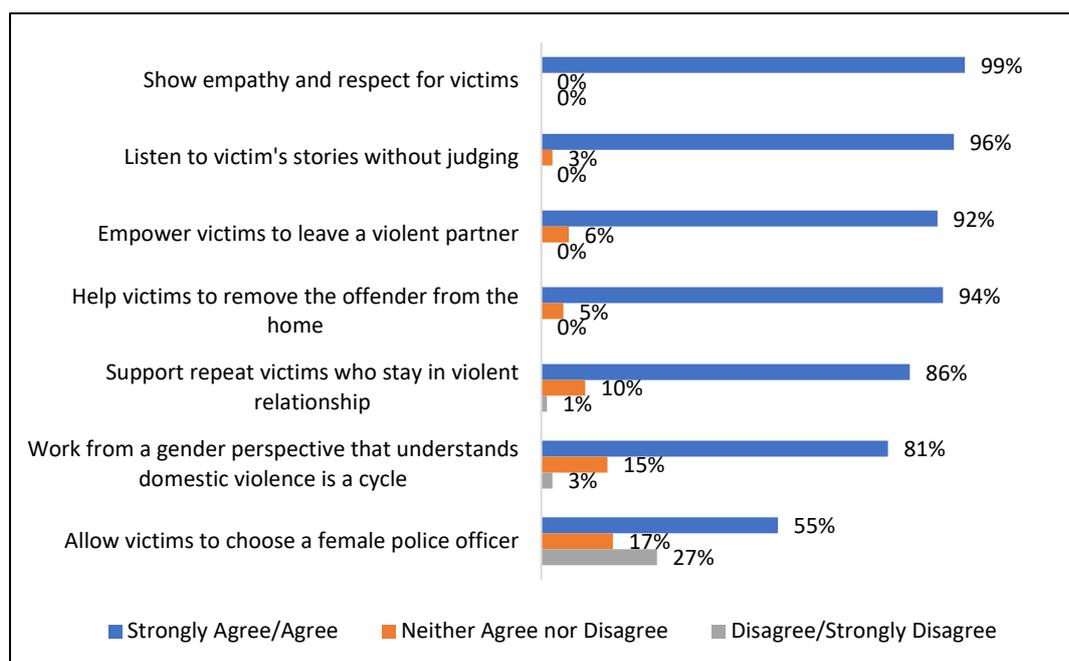
The second key question asked ‘Ideally, how should police respond to victims of gender violence?’ These ideals were based on the operational protocols of WPS in Argentina that we identified (Carrington et al. 2019). Seven statements were provided:

- Show empathy and respect for victims
- Listen to victim’s stories without judging
- Empower victims to leave a violent partner
- Help victims remove offender from home
- Support repeat victims who stay in violent relationships
- Work from a gender perspective that understands domestic violence is a cycle
- Allow victims to choose a female police officer

Respondents were able to select their level of agreement to each statement. Answers were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Respondent numbers ranged between 76-77 to each statement, from 78 respondents.

From the police respondents who answered this question, there was unanimous agreement (Strongly Agree/Agree) that police ideally should respond to victims of gender violence by showing empathy and respect for victims (Figure 5). That police should work from a gender perspective received 81% ($n=63$) Strongly Agree/Agree. Police respondents were least favourably disposed to allowing victims of male violence to choose a female police officer to receive their complaint (55%, $n=43$), with one quarter disagreeing/strongly disagreeing (27%, $n=21$) to this statement. We discuss the level of agreement on these two aspects in our analysis, and discuss statistically significant differences within or among the cohorts below.

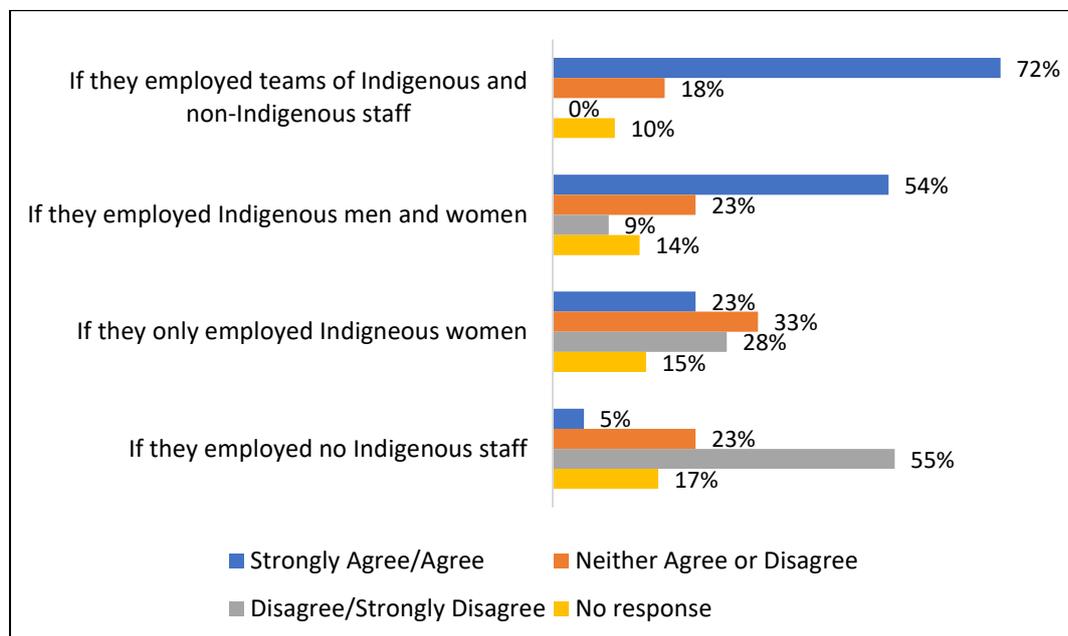
Figure 5 Ideally, how should police respond to victims of gender violence? (Police responses). Note: Missing responses have not been included.



Staffing of women’s police stations in Indigenous communities

The survey asked respondents: ‘Compared to traditional policing models, do you think that women’s police stations would respond better to gender violence in Indigenous communities in Australia?’ Four options were provided: 1) If they only employed Indigenous women; 2) If they employed Indigenous men and women; 3) If they employed teams of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff; and 4) If they employed no Indigenous staff (see, Figure 6). Answers were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Participation varied for this question. We discuss any statistically significant differences within or among the cohorts below.

Figure 6 Compared to traditional policing models, do you think that women’s police stations would respond better to gender violence in Indigenous communities in Australia? (Police responses)



Suggestions for gender-based violence prevention

Respondents were asked ‘Do you have any other ideas about how to prevent gender-based violence in Australia?’ This question was consistently interpreted to refer to primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. Of the 133 responses, 18 police (14%) responded to this question. Single responses featured ideas that fit across different codes, resulting in 44 coded responses for this cohort across 17 not mutually exclusive codes. Common themes are shown in Table 3. Qualitative responses align with aspects of the quantitative results and provide insight into these. Given the male and non-Indigenous status of majority of the respondents, and the gendered and racialised experiences of DFV, we note the gender and Indigeneity of the respondents after the quotes with the following codes:

- M = male
- F = female
- I = Indigenous

- NI = non-Indigenous

Table 3 Do you have any other ideas about how to prevent gender-based violence in Australia? Coded themes from police and remaining Workforce respondents.

Themes	Police Workforce		Remaining Workforce*	
	Coded responses	% of coded responses	Coded responses	% of coded responses
Total	44	100%	393	100%
Primary Prevention—Education	6	14%	37	9%
Collaborative Response	6	14%	29	7%
Tertiary Prevention—Offender Services	5	11%	17	4%
Legal Response—Offender Programs	5	11%	13	3%
Feedback on women’s police stations	4	9%	17	4%
Barriers	3	7%	4	1%
Legal Response—Law	3	7%	1	0.3%
Provision of Support—Longer Term	2	5%	14	6%
Targeted responses —Rural, Regional, Remote	2	5%	1	0.3%
Police Responses	1	2%	13	3%
Police Training	1	2%	13	3%
Legal Response—Systems	1	2%	9	2%
Feedback on Survey	1	2%	9	2%
Provision of Support—Children	1	2%	5	1%
Responses External to the Criminal Legal System	1	2%	4	1%
Appropriate Staff	1	2%	2	0.5%
Provision of Support—Family	1	2%	2	0.5%

*Themes that received zero response from police are not included here, thus numbers shown for total remaining Workforce does not equal 393.

Most qualitative responses referred to secondary and tertiary prevention. This is the main context in which police operate and this is where our interest resides. Unsurprisingly, given the topic of the survey, prevention suggestions were commonly coded as Collaborative (14%). These suggestions refer to a DFV response involving multiple organisations and systems. Examples include:

The first change I would like to see is having a central location for Family Violence Police, Victim support, Court support liaison, Emergency accommodation services etc. to work out of so that the organisations can work collaboratively. I believe that this would not only make it easier for the organisations working together but also simplify the process for the victims who are engaging in these services. (F, NI)

Violence is just not a Policing problem and we can't arrest our way through it without other agencies stepping up to the challenge. (M, NI)

Police officers need specialised training and [to] work collaboratively from a multi agency approach. (F, NI)

This supports quantitative findings with police supporting stations that included multidisciplinary teams (75%, $n=58$).

Other types of responses that police commonly thought could help prevent gender-based violence included Offender programs (11%) and Law (7%). Regarding Offender programs, respondents stated:

There is an urgent need for more perpetrator engagement programs that are better staffed and more accessible. (F, NI)

Gender Violence cannot be totally eradicated however it can decline through ongoing support, education programs and greater perpetrator engagement, requiring perpetrators to undergo programs to modify their behaviour. (M, NI)

This was supported by quantitative responses with 62% of police respondents selecting that working with offenders to break the cycle of violence was an aspect that could improve Australian police responses. A statistically significant gender difference ($\chi^2(1)=5.08, p=.024$) was found among police respondents for this aspect, with 50% male respondents and 70% of female respondents in support. Offender Programs was a less common response from the remaining Workforce cohort (3% v 11%), yet was also supported by this group in the question about aspects of stations with 75%. Law, however, was quite low for the Workforce cohort (0.3%).

Qualitative responses from police also featured comments about the notion of WPS (9%), particularly the gendered and Indigenous staffing element.

It is not the gender/ethnicity of a person that makes the difference, it is the person who has the character, understanding and willingness to work in a difficult work environment. (M, NI)

Gender, culture or skin colour is not a strong indicator of performance but rather an identity trait. (M, NI)

All comments in relation to women staff were made by male respondents and any comments of this sort were not present in responses from the remaining Workforce cohort. Caution from police around the perceived gender segregation element was strongly evident in the data, with only 19% ($n=15$) supportive of the idea of stations staffed predominantly by female police officers, a highly statistically significant difference ($\chi^2(1)=60.2236, p=0.00001$) between police and the Workforce cohort. There was also a statistically significant gender difference ($\chi^2(1)=4.07, p=.044$) on the provision of emergency support to victims, with more female officers being in support of this.

The differences between the police respondents and remaining Workforce cohort on questions of gender is notable. In response to the second key question, just over half (55%, $n=43$) of police respondents Strongly Agreed or Agreed with the option of allowing victims of male

violence to choose a female police officer to receive their complaint compared to 86% ($n=172$) of the remaining Workforce ($\chi^2(1)=45.184$, $p<0.00001$). Caution around the perceived gender segregated aspect was also evident in other quantitative responses, with police generally not supportive of stations working from a gender perspective (19%, $n=15$) compared to 80% from the remaining Workforce cohort ($\chi^2(1)=93.0076$, $p=0.00001$) (Figure 4). This is particularly striking because, in response to the second key question, 81% ($n=63$) of police respondents Strongly Agreed or Agreed that police should work from a gender perspective that understands domestic violence is a cycle (Figure 5). Similar disparities were present for the remaining Workforce cohort, with 80% supportive of stations working from a gender perspective and 92% who Strongly Agreed and Agreed that police should work from a gender perspective that understands domestic violence is a cycle. There were no statistically significant differences within the police cohort in response to questions of gender.

Acknowledgement of the complexities in responding to DFV in Indigenous communities was evident in other themes, such as discussion of Barriers in preventing DFV (3/44). Responses and suggestions in this theme generally referred to wider criminal legal system and structural problems.

Our history in Australia when it comes to government dealing of ATSI people created distrust that we will always struggle to overcome. (F, NI)

Stronger legislation surrounding protected witnesses at court. Time and time again, police struggle to get the victim to show up to court and testify when (especially in rural and remote localities) the victim is sitting in the same waiting area / courtyard as the offender. (F, NI)

Police respondents predominantly Strongly Agree or Agree (72%) that if stations were to be established in Indigenous communities, Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff are required (compared to 54% only Indigenous staff and 23% only Indigenous women). There were statistically significant differences between the cohorts for the following aspects: stations staffed only by Indigenous women ($\chi^2(1)=22.2792$, $p=.0125$); stations with no Indigenous staff ($\chi^2(1)=14.8573$, $p=.0125$). Police were most likely to indicate a neutral position to stations staffed by Indigenous women, and Workforce respondents were most likely to indicate disagreement with the idea. For the element 'stations with no Indigenous staff', Workforce respondents were far more likely to disagree or strongly disagree with the idea than police respondents. Another gender difference was found among police respondents relating to stations being staffed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous personnel. While no police agreed with the aspect, a greater proportion of female police disagreed with it than male police, a few of whom indicated a neutral response ($\chi^2(1)=5.1444$, $p=.023322$). All comments on the topic of Indigenous staffing and references to Indigenous people and policing were made by non-Indigenous respondents, but there were only two Indigenous respondents.

Discussion

Critically, most police survey respondents supported the translation of some features of women's police stations into an Australian context to improve the police response to DFV. This was demonstrated in both the qualitative and quantitative data. Most respondents supported multidisciplinary stations and aspects that holistically view DFV in context. Support for co-locational responses from Australian police was also evident in the literature review with police valuing the many benefits. Our survey found hesitation around various elements, such

as significantly less support for stations staffed predominantly by women (19%), which we discuss below.

Qualitative and quantitative data showed general police support for behavioural change programs, and this is also evident in other police documents and studies (Diemer et al. 2015; QPS 2021; VicPol 2021). Differences in responses coded as Law across the cohorts suggest differences in beliefs of efficacy in legal responses between police and other sector workers. The higher proportion of this kind of response from police is not particularly surprising given the grounding of police work in law. Conversely, other sector workers broadly spoke of the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of legal response.

There were some interesting differences between the cohorts in responses to questions about the gendered elements of WPS. The differences in quantitative responses around the ability to choose a female officer and stations being staffed predominantly by female officers could indicate that police respondents see race and gender as irrelevant to policing DFV and this is supported by qualitative data. Qualitative comments about women staff did not occur in responses from the remaining Workforce cohort and comments ($n=2$) stating the irrelevance of gender came solely from male police in the 0-3 years' work experience range. Notably, there were no statistically significant differences between male and female police for gendered aspects.

There were similar disparities present across the cohorts for differences in responses to stations working from a gender perspective compared to 'police should work from a gender perspective that understands domestic violence is a cycle'. It is probable this was an issue of communication on our part where 'a gender perspective' is supplemented in the second key question with the phrase 'that understands domestic violence is a cycle', but not in the first. Perhaps in the first instance the element 'work from a gender perspective' was taken to mean exclusively women officers serving exclusively women clients. However, the second figure where police support the notion of working from a gender perspective that understand domestic violence is a cycle suggests that police are supportive of aspects that holistically view DFV in context. This is also evident in responses that show favour for working with victims to break the cycle of violence and supporting repeat victims. The consistent disparities across cohorts for the two questions about the DFV cycle reaffirm the possibility of a communication issue and demonstrate responses to the perceived gender segregation element are, in some cases, issues of perception. Yet, there are still notable disparities between police and the remaining Workforce cohort for other gendered elements. This may highlight the aversion to gendering DFV despite it being a heavily gendered issue. This is unsurprising given that policing is a predominantly masculine institution (Bartkowiak-Theron and Layton 2012; Brown and Silvestri 2020; Rabe-Hemp 2008), even though police respondents were 46% women. The gender difference within the police cohort for the provision of emergency support perhaps shows a greater understanding from women police about the immediate needs of a DFV victim.

Some comments about Indigenous staffing demonstrate recognition of the cultural nuances of responding to DFV in Indigenous communities. We are rightfully cautious about the notion that women's police stations could improve policing in Indigenous communities. The police respondents perhaps felt similarly, with statistically significantly more responses of Neither Agree nor Disagree for some survey options around staffing of stations in Indigenous communities. This could imply police respondents are conscientious of the tensions in policing

in Indigenous communities and/or have some sense of their own lack of cultural competence (see, Dwyer et al. 2021; Whellum et al. 2020). Any DFV policing response in such locations needs local Indigenous community support and staff to be recognised as legitimate, effectively support victims, and to avoid further harm. Figures supporting staffing by Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff (72%) aligned with this. However, Indigenous communities may prefer self-determination in developing and delivering community-appropriate responses (Buxton-Namisnyk 2021; Langton et al. 2020; The Lowitja Institute 2019), and should be supported in this. Of course, Indigenous people do not just live in discrete communities, and there should be a range of responses for *anyone* who does not wish to engage with police.

Bolstered by findings from Australian evaluations into co-locational responses, we argue that Australian police support a co-locational approach to policing DFV. Police receptiveness is important to the success of any trial or practice implementation, as it impacts their day-to-day work. Given this evidence, research implications for practice suggest that there is a strong case for further trial of co-locational responses in Australia. Evaluation is also required of those few co-locational responses currently in place to develop evidence for their efficacy, which will then support the case for replication.

Conclusion

Providing a multidisciplinary response environment to DFV where criminalisation is not the only option may help to elide harm for victims and perpetrators. While women's police stations enable a *reimagining* of policing moving away from a law-and-order response to DFV to a cohesive service response designated to receive and support victims (Carrington et al. 2021b), legislative barriers around police requirements to initiate reports and investigation currently prevent this. Those who do not want a policing response may still come to the attention of police (for example, neighbours calling police or living in heavily policed environments). Queensland Police Service is exploring the potential of having single officers located at DFV service providers and recognises the tensions of the legislative barrier in this context (QPS 2021). For multidisciplinary client-facing responses involving police to be effective, options away from criminalisation are needed to enable choice and to reduce harms, and legislative barriers require amendment to provide this agency.

Isolated responses to DFV are inadequate and, as supported by literature, can cause further harm. Evidence supports that a range of collaborative police units specifically designed to respond to DFV may improve the secondary and tertiary prevention of DFV, and police in our study support some aspects of this such as working in multidisciplinary teams. Other obstacles in policing DFV require systemic change including leadership structures, holistic training, and transformation in the perspective of DFV (Carrington et al. 2021a). Such systemic change may change perspective of aspects of WPS that police were hesitant about leading to wider support for the critical innovation required to improve police responses.

This article contributes to understanding how Australian police perceive co-locational responses. It also adds new knowledge about police perceptions of women's police stations, which share much in common with the co-located approach. Given our evidence, research implications for practice indicate a case for additional trial of co-locational responses in Australia. There is much to be learnt from co-locational responses, such as WPS, and they are just one innovation that can contribute to the transformation of policing DFV in Australia and elsewhere in the world.



Image 1



Image 2



Image 3



Image 4

Image 1 Reception Queensland police station, Australia

Image 2 Reception women's police station, Argentina

Image 3 Interview room, Australia

Image 4 Interview room women's police station, Argentina

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