



# PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER  
LAUNCH OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH  
MELBOURNE - 4 APRIL 1989**

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This is an important day for Australia.

It is the day that marks the beginning of an innovative and vital campaign of community education - education to break the silence surrounding the scourge of domestic violence.

Domestic violence is a widespread and a deep-rooted problem in the Australian community.

Thousands of Australian women and children are suffering physical and mental hurt within their homes through verbal abuse, threats, harrasment, bullying and bashing.

Yet, too often, fear and misplaced shame are preventing those victims from breaking the silence on which this repugnant form of violence thrives.

And too often the rest of the community has stood quietly to one side while this violence is perpetrated - turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to violence in the home that would not be tolerated if it was brought out into the open.

The time has come for the Australian community to say enough is enough.

We must break the silence.

The Federal Government believes that domestic violence must be seen for what it is - a matter of national concern.

That is why in 1987 we created the National Domestic Violence Education Program and why as part of that program I am today declaring this month to be National Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

I am calling on the people of Australia to join with the Government in a campaign of education to understand better what are for many of our fellow Australians the hard facts of family life.

It's an indication of the hidden nature of domestic violence that precise statistics about it don't exist.

What evidence we do have is depressing: it is clear that, as in other similar countries, domestic violence has reached an appalling extent within the Australian community.

Every day, some 2000 women and children are making use of women's refuges and shelters - most of them fleeing violence in their home.

They come from prosperous homes and they come from less well-off homes. They come from all parts of Australia, from capital cities and from the country.

In a Federal Government survey in 1987, almost half the respondents said they knew either a victim or a perpetrator of domestic violence.

The survey also revealed one in five Australians believe the use of physical force by a man against his wife to be acceptable in some circumstances.

U.S. research suggests that one quarter of hospital casualty patients may be victims of domestic violence.

But many such statistics only tell us of those cases of domestic violence which come to public notice, or are recognised by doctors and hospitals.

Many of the women who suffer domestic violence keep silent about their injuries, and therefore hide the violence from their doctors, from official statistics - even from their friends and relatives.

Equally, the causes of domestic violence are complex.

Researchers believe it may be triggered by stress and frustration, exacerbated by alcohol, and based perhaps on a deep-seated inability of some people to resolve without violence the difficulties that occur in their relationships.

But behind all this there is the unassailable fact that as a community we are all too accustomed to condoning domestic violence - all too ready to avoid the uncomfortable questions that may expose violence within the home.

This campaign seeks at least to start the process of reversing those attitudes.

I take this opportunity to pay special tribute to the absolutely vital work that has been performed over many years by women's refuges and shelters.

Throughout our suburbs and towns, refuges and shelters are providing women with the means to escape violence at home and to build a new life.

As Prime Minister I want to recognise and express my respect for the invaluable support and assistance rendered to victims of domestic violence by the dedicated people, including many volunteers, who run these refuges and shelters.

Australia was the first country to provide national Government funding for refugees and we still have in international terms a proud record of support for this important work.

In this month devoted to increasing awareness of domestic violence, the Federal Government will sponsor a media campaign; we have prepared posters, pamphlets, and a discussion kit; and a video on domestic violence, which has already been shown on SBS, is available for groups to borrow.

The support we have received for the program from so many areas of the Australian community is indicated by the range of distinguished guests here today. Our efforts have been constructively assisted by State and Territory Governments. I acknowledge, particularly, the role of the Commonwealth/State Task Force which co-ordinates the program.

Our project also has the support of Local Government, the churches, the trade union movement, the medical, nursing and legal professions and members of police forces. I welcome guests from all those areas.

I also welcome the presence and participation of a wide variety of community groups who will play an active part in the Awareness Month. Among hundreds of local initiatives, 51 community groups across Australia will be carrying out projects funded by grants from the national program during April.

If anyone needed an example of why this is an important campaign, they should listen, as we have just done, to Lola McCarg.

She has told us at first hand about the devastating experience of just one of the thousands of women who experience violence in their own homes.

Her words are the courageous words of a survivor, and they are words of frankness and generosity. In speaking out about her personal experiences to remind us that women can do something about domestic violence instead of suffering it in silence, Lola McCarg has made a very fitting start to this campaign of breaking the silence.

Now is the time to break the silence which has shrouded domestic violence.

It's up to all of us - not least the men - to realise and to state that domestic violence is just not acceptable.

Put at its simplest - men should understand that such behaviour is cowardly - it is a sign not of strength but of weakness.

It's up to neighbours and friends to support and protect any woman who can be seen to be suffering fear and distress.

It's up to parents and teachers to work against the patterns which foster the notion that violence is an appropriate way to express frustration and worry.

It's up to doctors and religious advisers to be alert to the signs of violence, and to understand the support needed by women who seek their assistance.

It's up to communities to be alert to violence as a community problem.

It's up to the media, and other influential groups within our community, to help break the silence about domestic violence.

We want an Australia where Lola McCarg and thousands like her are free of the threat of violence in the home.

It is my hope that this National Awareness month will help eradicate that threat.

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