

DRAFT Gender Equity Strategy

2018-2030

*A strategy to achieve gender equality, prevent family violence and respond to the needs of victims in Maribyrnong*

Acknowledgement of country

We acknowledge that we are on traditional lands of the Kulin Nation. We offer our respect to the Elders of these traditional lands, and through them to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples past, present and emerging.

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# Introduction

In 2015, the Royal Commission into Family Violence concluded that ‘Family violence is a gendered crime’ and that ending violence against women requires addressing gender inequality in all its forms – in the workplace, school yards, on television screens and on sporting fields.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Despite the recent investment and commitments at all levels of government, family violence, violence against women and gender inequality continue to cause substantial harm in our community. In Australia at least one woman a week is killed by a partner or former partner and intimate partner violence contributes to more death, disability and illness in women aged 15 to 44 than any other preventable risk factor.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Gender inequality is also a pervasive and persistent problem in our community. Women currently earn 14.6% less than men[[3]](#endnote-3), are more likely to work part-time and in insecure employment, they do three times the amount of unpaid caring and domestic work and are significantly more likely to be single parents. A result of this inequality is that women retire with half the superannuation and savings when compared with men; they have greater economic insecurity, are more likely to live in poverty[[4]](#endnote-4) and be homeless, and have poor health outcomes.

Conversely, pursuing gender equality benefits everyone. Gender equality does not just reduce family violence and violence against women; it challenges the stereotypes and presumptions that constrict us and helps put us all on a platform to succeed in our own ways – women and men. It has also been clearly demonstrated that gender equality has significant health, social and economic benefits.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Changes in structures, attitudes and behaviours require significant investment and won’t happen overnight. Local government works across a number of settings, including early years, youth and family services, education, sports, health, arts and culture and workplaces, and is well placed to build knowledge and raise awareness of individuals, communities and organisations. We are also responsible for planning and shaping the built environment, which has a profound effect on the community’s access to resources, services and infrastructure. Well resourced environments contribute to a more equal society and assist in the prevention of violence against women and children.[[6]](#endnote-6)

This Gender Equity Strategy 2030 (the Strategy) sets our long-term commitment and guides investment and action to achieve gender equality, prevent family violence and respond to the needs of victims of family violence in Maribyrnong. It includes an ambitious set of evidence-based objectives and strategies to achieve our vision: *where all people in Maribyrnong flourish and live free from violence and discrimination and have equal status, rights, opportunities, representation and respect, regardless of their gender.*

The Strategy aligns with the recent changes in the national, state, regional and local policy environment. It is long term; from 2018 to 2030 to align with *Preventing Violence Together 2030: Western Region Strategy to Prevent Violence Against Women*. The Strategy will be accompanied by a detailed 2-year action plan that will outline how together we can create a more equal Maribyrnong, where family violence and violence against women are a thing of the past.



# Our Strategy at a Glance

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| --- |
| **Vision:**  |
| All people in Maribyrnong flourish and live free from violence and discrimination and have equal status, rights, opportunities, representation and respect, regardless of their gender. |
| **Guiding principles:** |
| * Human Rights
* Prevention
* Community-centred
* Intersectionality
 | * Work across all life stages
* Evidence and innovation
* Collaboration
 |
| **Our role:** |  | **Objectives:** |
| Service provision and community strengthening |  | 1. Strengthen our response to family violence and violence against women.
2. Work alongside the community to prevent violence and normalise gender equality in public and private life.
 |
| Local leadership |  | 1. Increase women’s independence and role in decision making.
 |
| Policy and planning |  | 1. Ensure that the development of policy, programs and services considers the specific impacts on the health, wellbeing and safety of women and men.
 |
| Developing facilities and creating safe public environments |  | 1. Increase the number of safe and gender-equitable facilities and public environments.
 |
| Employer and procurer |  | 1. Take steps to be a more safe and gender-equitable organisation.
 |
| **Our approach: (OurWatch Change the Story Framework)** |
| * Challenge condoning of violence against women
* Promote women’s independence and decision-making
* Challenge gender stereotypes and roles
* Strengthen positive, equal and respectful relationships
* Promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life
 |

# Vision

All people in Maribyrnong flourish and live free from violence and discrimination and have equal status, rights, opportunities, representation and respect, regardless of their gender.

# Principles

This Strategy is guided by the following principles:

1. **Human Rights** Family violence and violence against women are a human rights violation. Council supports the right of all individuals to life free from violence and discrimination regardless of their sex, gender identity, sexuality, ethnicity, age, ability or religion.
2. **Prevention** Family violence and violence against women are not inevitable, they are preventable. We recognise that prevention is everyone’s business and responsibility and commit to undertake action that is systemic and enduring to prevent violence against women and children from occurring.
3. **Community centred** Council recognises that everybody has a role in promoting gender equity and preventing violence against women. We value the collective experience and knowledge of the community and will work together to harness strength, potential and resources to reduce violence against women and children and create a gender-equitable Maribyrnong.
4. **Intersectionality** Gender inequality and violence do not impact all people in the same way.For many, the impact of gender inequality is intensified by the way that gendered barriers interact with other forms of disadvantage and discrimination, such as racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism and classism. We will use tailored, culturally safe strategies for groups that are at a greater risk of gender-based violence and its impacts.
5. **Life stages** Women and children experience gender inequality and violence differently throughout the stages of their lives. The City will take into account the impact that stage of life has on women and girls financial security, health and wellbeing when planning policy and programs and ensure that their voices are valued and heard.
6. **Evidence and innovation** We are committed to evidence-informed practice, which is guided by research and theory, and effective monitoring and evaluation. We also recognise that innovation in the promotion of gender equity and prevention of violence against women should be pursued. We will facilitate creativity and welcome tests, pilots and experiments.
7. **Collaboration** Toprevent violence against women and children we must work together in partnerships with the community that we serve and carry out collaborative and participatory processes to support the sharing of knowledge, skills, resources and influence.

# Context

Maribyrnong City Council has a long history of undertaking innovative and sector-leading work in the promotion of gender equity and prevention of violence against women.

As the level of government closest to the community, Victorian Councils have a mandate to create healthy, safe and inclusive communities. As a result of the Victorian Government Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV) in 2015, Councils are now required to have an increased focus on family violence prevention and response at a local level through development of municipal public health and wellbeing plans. In particular Councils must *report on the measures they propose to take to reduce family violence and respond to the needs of victims*.[[7]](#endnote-7)

## Our community

The city of Maribyrnong is undergoing significant change. Population growth, redevelopment, gentrification, and a transitioning economy is leading to an influx of new residents and businesses. Maribyrnong’s multicultural diversity is evident with 40 per cent of residents born overseas and many new arrivals, asylum seekers, and people who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders[[8]](#endnote-8). Our city has a relatively young population with many infants and young adults. The population is forecast to grow to approximately 156,000 by 2041.

Gentrification and population growth continue to change the city’s demographics through age, cultural background and wealth. Levels of income, education, employment have risen over the last decade. High population growth provides great opportunities for retail, services, land use and economy on a larger scale and quality. Conversely, it also provides great challenges in identifying service need and adjusting provision to meet demand whilst managing congestion, urban growth, liveability and promoting health equity.

## Violence and gender inequality in our community

Our local data is compelling. In Maribyrnong, 611 women reported family violence incidents to police in 2017, which equates to about 12 reports every week and approximately 1.6 reports every day.[[9]](#endnote-9) We also know that police referrals only account for approximately 25% of all referrals to family violence services.[[10]](#endnote-10) So whilst compelling, our current data does not fully capture the scale of the issue in our municipality.

In addition, gender inequality persists in our community; women currently earn 14.6% less than men[[11]](#endnote-11) and retire with half the superannuation and savings. As a consequence, women face greater risk of economic insecurity in retirement, are more likely to live in poverty[[12]](#endnote-12) and are at greater risk of homelessness than men. [[13]](#endnote-13)

Furthermore, women in Maribyrnong make up 84 per cent of lone parents (compared to 16% who were men), they do three times the amount of unpaid work[[14]](#endnote-14) and only half of women work full time compared to two-thirds of men. [[15]](#endnote-15)

Women also have differing health and wellbeing needs to men. Only a third of women in Maribyrnong get enough exercise, a quarter have experienced depression or anxiety (compared to one in five for men), and women were also less likely to report feeling safe walking at night when compared to men.[[16]](#endnote-16)

We also know that violence is experienced differently by different women and groups;

* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience higher rates and more severe forms of violence than non-indigenous women,[[17]](#endnote-17)
* Women with disabilities experience violence at significantly higher rates, more frequently, for longer, in more ways and by more perpetrators compared to women and girls without a disability.[[18]](#endnote-18)
* 18-24 year old women experience higher rates of physical and sexual violence than older women.[[19]](#endnote-19)
* Women are at an increased risk of experiencing violence from an intimate partner violence during pregnancy and post-partum.[[20]](#endnote-20)
* Women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds experiencing family violence are particularly vulnerable. An already difficult situation is accentuated by language difficulties, unfamiliarity with service systems, social dislocation due to immigration, alienation from culture and community, grief related to experiences of torture and trauma and limited culturally appropriate services[[21]](#endnote-21); and
* People who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Asexual and Queer (LGBTIQA+) experience intimate partner violence at similar rates as those who identify as heterosexual [[22]](#endnote-22) and experience high rates of discrimination and inequality in daily life. However, violence in the LGBTIQA+ community is not well understood and is often ignored.

In addition, these groups face significant barriers in accessing support services that are inclusive and responsive to their needs.

## Council’s role

Local government can make a difference because its reach across the community where people live, work, learn and play, from birth to old age, is unrivalled. As a large employer, advocate, service provider and leader, local government has the capacity to influence many of the determinants of health and wellbeing, including gender.

Council can work to prevent violence against women in practical ways through our role in:

* Local leadership
* Planning
* Developing facilities and creating safe public environments
* Service provision; and
* As an employer and procurer.

Local Government community services such as maternal and child health, early childhood services, youth services and positive aging, also work directly with individuals at risk or experiencing violence, and are an essential part of the family violence response system.

## Our framework and approach

This Strategy takes a primary prevention approach drawn from public health and health promotion theory and practice. Distinct from response or early intervention actions, primary prevention takes action before violence occurs.[[23]](#endnote-23)

Our framework (Table 2. Below) *Change the Story:* *A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia (*Our Watch et al. 2015) presents an evidence-based approach to guide our work and redress the key gendered drivers of violence against women. It identifies four drivers of violence against women that are associated with five essential actions that work to prevent violence.

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| **Gendered drivers of violence against women**  |  | **Essential actions that will prevent violence** |
| * Condoning of violence against women
* Men’s control of decision making and limits to women’s independence
* Stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity
* Disrespect towards women and male peer relations that emphasise aggression
 |  | * Challenge condoning of violence against women
* Promote women’s independence and decision-making
* Challenge gender stereotypes and roles
* Strengthen positive, equal and respectful relationships; and
* Promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life.
 |

***Table 2: Strategy framework; adapted from the Change the Story (OurWatch, 2015)***

The socio-ecological model (Figure 1.) presents a useful way to understand how violence against women occurs. The model illustrates the dynamic interrelations between individual, organisational, community, systemic and social factors, recognising that a person’s behaviour does not occur in a vacuum.

**Figure 1: Socio-ecological model (adapted from VicHealth 2007 and Women’s Health West 2017)**

The socio-ecological model illustrates that local government actions can be focussed at all levels, for example:

* The Individual level relates to Council services that have direct contact with residents such as maternal and child health services and local laws teams;
* The Relationship level relates to those settings and programs that seek to promote healthy relationships and gender equity, such as programs implemented by children’s, youth and family services;
* The Community level relates to the settings such as schools, sporting venues, arts and culture, workplaces and neighbourhoods in which social relationships occur;
* The Organisation level relates to our role as a large local employer and leader that can role model gender equity and the prevention of violence; and
* The Societal level relates to health, economic and social policies and our approach to communications, which drives community attitudes and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity.

In addition, we recognise that there are a number of reinforcing factors that do not cause, but can contribute to, or exacerbate, violence. These include financial pressures, alcohol and other drug abuse, risky or problem gambling, mental illness, social and economic exclusion and previous exposure to violence.[[24]](#endnote-24) It is important that our approach takes these factors into account and aligns with Council’s existing work and health policies relating to alcohol and other drugs, gambling, social inclusion, economic development and early years and youth services.

## Partnerships & Collaboration

The Strategy acknowledges that Council cannot achieve our vision on our own; gender inequality, family violence and violence against women are complex social problems that do not have an easy fix. To be successful in overcoming inequality and violence, we need to work collaboratively across the organisation and in partnership with other local stakeholders to make the most of partners’ knowledge, skills, expertise and resources and to achieve the best outcomes for the community.

We are committed to *Preventing Violence Together 2030: Western Region Strategy to Prevent Violence Against Women*, which is led by Women’s Health West. *Preventing Violence Together 2030* partner organisations from across the region have committed to work together to preventing violence against women, using a collective impact approach.

In addition, we are committed to the *Western Integrated Family Violence Committee* (WIFVC) and *Action for Equity: A sexual and reproductive health strategy for Melbourne’s west 2018-2022,* also led by Women’s Health West.

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# Objectives and Strategies

The following evidence-based objectives and strategies outline how we plan to meet the requirements for local government that have come from the 2015 Royal Commission into Family Violence. They also outline how we will achieve our vision: *where all people in Maribyrnong flourish and live free from violence and discrimination and have equal status, rights, opportunities, representation and respect, regardless of their gender*.

The Gender Equity Strategy 2030 will be accompanied by detailed 2-year action plans. The city will make amendments to the Strategies and Actions as novel State legislation becomes enacted (such as the Victorian Government Gender Equality Bill, currently in draft).

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| **Objective 1:** Strengthen our response to violence against women and family violence |
| **Strategy 1.1:** Ensure that our services are equipped to respond effectively to violence against women and family violence**Strategy 1.2:** Encourage help seeking and provide accessible information about family violence services across Council service touch points.  |
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| **Objective 2:** Work alongside the community to prevent violence and normalise gender equality in public and private life. |
| **Strategy 2.1:** Increase the community’s awareness and understanding of gender inequality, family violence and violence against women, and their role in primary prevention.**Strategy 2.2:** Decrease attitudes and behaviours within the community that condone violence against women and perpetuate gender inequality.**Strategy 2.3:** Strengthen the commitment and capacity of the community to challenge rigid gender roles and gender stereotypes.**Strategy 2.4:** Strengthen positive, equal and respectful relationships through Council educations programs, services and resources. |
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| **Objective 3:** Increase women’s independence and role in decision making  |
| **Strategy 3.1:** Support and encourage local women from diverse backgrounds to become Councillors and take on other leadership roles in the community**Strategy 3.2:** Celebrate the contribution, achievements and leadership of women within the community and organisation**Strategy 3.3:** Support women’s financial independence and participation in community life |

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| **Objective 4: 1.** Ensure that the development of policy, programs and services considers the specific impacts on the health, wellbeing and safety of women and men. |
| **Strategy 4.1:** Increase the use of sex disaggregated data to inform Council policies, plans and programs. **Strategy 4.2:** Apply an intersectional gender lens to our community consultation activities to capture the perspectives and needs of all community members.**Strategy 4.3:** Align the Gender Equity Strategy 2030 and Actions with internal, regional and state Gender Equity and PVAW strategies.**Strategy 4.4:** Develop a monitoring and evaluation framework with clear evaluation points for the life of the Strategy. |
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| **Objective 5:** Increase the number of safe and gender-equitable facilities and public environments to facilitate equal participation in Community and civic life. |
| **Strategy 5.1:** Increase use of gender analysis and sex disaggregated data in planning and advising on the public realm, land use, facilities planning and parks and open space. **Strategy 5.2:** Apply universal design[[25]](#endnote-25) and crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED)[[26]](#endnote-26) principles when planning and upgrading community facilities, infrastructure and public environments.**Strategy 5.3:** Take steps to increase the number of women and children using active transport (walking, cycling, and public transport). |
|  |
| **Objective 6:** Take steps to be a safer and more gender equitable organisation. |
| **Strategy 6.1:** Demonstrate ongoing commitment to preventing violence against women and children and have structures, strategies and policies that explicitly promote gender equality.**Strategy 6.2:** Embed gender equality in our recruitment, remuneration and promotion processes, and support women and men to utilise flexible work options without penalty.**Strategy 6.3:** Take steps to make sure that all staff feel safe and confident in the workplace. Actively challenge gender stereotypes, roles and norms. **Strategy 6.4:** Increase thegender balance in leadership positions across all directorates of Council **Strategy 6.5:** Ensure that we have the structures, practices and culture to respond appropriately to staff and stakeholders affected by violence, bullying and sexual harassment.**Strategy 6.6:** Utilise media and communication opportunities to promote non-stereotypical gender roles and raise awareness of gender equity and violence against women. |

# How the Strategy was developed

In early 2018, a reference group of internal stakeholders was recruited from across Council to inform the development of the Strategy, test the proposed consultation approach and act as internal peer reviewers.

A consultant was recruited to prepare a Background Report, facilitate stakeholder engagement and to report on the consultation outcomes. The Background Report explored and made recommendations relating to Council’s previous work, promising practice within the Local Government sector, and statistics and evidence that apply to our municipality.

To capture the perspectives of internal stakeholders, we ran in-depth consultation with staff from across the organisation via a series of four workshops. The workshops explored four themes; early intervention and our current response to violence, prevention, council’s role in building safe and gender-equitable places and spaces and the workplace. Staff that were unable to attend the workshops were invited to complete an online survey that aligned with the face-to-face consultation workshops.

The draft Strategy will be presented to our regional partners, key stakeholders and community for comment before the document is finalised.

# Implementation and evaluation

By tracking progress and reporting on the impact and outcomes of the Strategy, we will be able to strengthen our evidence base and encourage a culture of learning and improvement.

The strategy will be accompanied by bi-annual action plans. In line with Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP) reporting requirements, an annual progress report will be submitted to the Department of Health and Human Services and made publically available.

A detailed Evaluation Plan will be developed to accompany the Strategy in early 2019. We will monitor trends in population level outcomes over the life of the plan and review and amend our actions accordingly. Figure 2. (below) lists some key evaluation milestones that will occur across the life of the Strategy. We will apply the following three levels of evaluation at defined intervals:

* Progress – Have we done what we said we would do?
* Impact – Are we having the influence we expected?
* Outcome – Have we achieved the change we sought?

In addition, the evaluation of the Strategy will align with the Preventing Violence Together 2030 Shared Measurement and Evaluation Framework: Implementation Plan (2018) and associated projects, as well as the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Outcomes Framework (2016)[[27]](#endnote-27) and other relevant Victorian Legislation (such as the Gender Equality Bill, currently in draft).

The implementation and evaluation of the strategy will be overseen by Council’s Health and Wellbeing Development team and supported by the Gender Equity Ambassador, a role appointed to a Maribyrnong Councillor at the beginning of each four-year Council term.

## Gender Equity Strategy Evaluation Timeline

***Figure 2: Gender Equity Strategy Evaluation Timeline***

# Glossary

### Family violence:

The Victorian *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* defines family violence as:

‘(a) behaviour that is physically, sexually, emotionally, psychologically or economically abusive; threatening or coercive; or in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes them to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person; or (b) behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, behaviour referred to in paragraph (a)’.

### Family:

Our use of the term ‘families’ is all encompassing. It acknowledges the variety of relationships and structures that can make up family units and kinship networks, and the range of ways family violence can be experienced, including through family-like or carer relationships and other interpersonal relationships, and across all genders and sexualities.

### Violence against women:

Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual and psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. It can also include financial abuse, the use of intimidation, threats and isolation.[[28]](#endnote-28)

### Sex:

Sex refers to a person’s biological characteristics. A person’s sex is usually described as being male or female. Some people may not be exclusively male or female, or may not identify with either category.

Gender:

Refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours and attributes that society considers appropriate for women and men. Unlike the biological characteristics and differences between women and men known as sex, gender roles are socially learnt, differ among cultures and change over time.

### Gender identity:

How people feel about themselves in relation to their biological sex and society’s expectations of our behaviours and roles as a male or female.[[29]](#endnote-29)

### Gender expression:

How people present themselves to the world and how they express their masculine and feminine qualities to communicate their gender outwardly.

### Gender equality:

As defined in Victoria’s Gender Equality Plan[[30]](#endnote-30), gender equality is “the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women, men, trans and gender diverse people. Equality does not mean that women, men, trans and gender diverse people will become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on their gender.”

### Gender equity:

The process of delivering on fairness to women and men. The concept recognises that within all communities, women and men have different benefits, access to power, resources and responsibilities. It takes into consideration the differences in women’s and men’s lives and recognises that different approaches to achieving gender equity may be needed to produce outcomes that are fair. In other words, strategies and measures must be available to compensate for women’s historical and social disadvantages and ensure that women are living and participating on an equal basis. Gender equity leads to gender equality.

### Primary prevention:

A primary prevention approach is a long-term agenda that aims to prevent violence from ever happening in the first place. Primary prevention works by identifying the deep underlying causes of violence – the social norms, structures and practices that influence individual attitudes and behaviours – and acting across the whole population to change these, not just the behaviour of perpetrators. Primary prevention is distinct from early intervention and crisis response activities (also known as secondary and tertiary response) that aim to stop violence from escalating or recurring. An effective primary prevention approach will support and complement early intervention and crisis response efforts and activities by reducing pressure on these other parts of the system.

### Gendered drivers:

The specific elements or expressions of gender inequality that are most strongly linked to violence against women. They relate to the particular structures, norms and practices arising from gender inequality in public and private life. The gendered drivers are the underlying causes required to create the necessary conditions in which violence against women occurs. They must always be considered in the context of other forms of social discrimination and disadvantage.

### Structural discrimination and disadvantage:

The norms, policies and systems present in politics, the legal system, education, workplaces and health care that are intended to be neutral, but in effect present obstacles to groups or individuals in achieving the same rights and opportunities available to the majority of the population.

Sex disaggregated data:

Data that is collected and presented separately for men, women and gender diverse.

### Intersectionality:

Gender, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion or age, can interact on multiple levels to create overlapping forms of discrimination and power imbalances which compounds the risk of experiencing family violence. This often results in simultaneous and compounding experiences of discrimination and disadvantage for particular groups and communities, including women

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25. http://sport.vic.gov.au/universal-design-fact-sheet [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. https://aic.gov.au/publications/crimprev/cpted [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/publications/policiesandguidelines/victorian-public-health-and-wellbeing-outcomes-framework [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. https://plan4womenssafety.dss.gov.au/resources/what-is-violence-against-women/ [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. [The Line, 2018](https://www.theline.org.au/parents-gender-versus-sex) [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
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