



Government targets family violence

As the work year begins and families look back on the holiday season, not all of them had a happy relaxing time.

Many families experience considerable stress as they deal with mounting credit card debt after Christmas, long hot summer school holidays and doomed New Year's resolutions.

Unfortunately, some of these pressures lead to family violence, particularly towards women and children.

The number of women and children who suffer significant risk, and even death, at the hands of other family members, remains a scourge on our society.

In Victoria during 2005-06, 43 per cent of homicides were related to family violence. While homicide rates in Australia have dropped by one third in the past seven years, the rate of family violence homicides has remained the same.

As Victorian Attorney-General Rob Hulls states, "Research indicates that these homicides are the escalation of a predictable pattern of behaviour and should be viewed as a connected group, not as isolated events".

Clearly, more targeted crime prevention measures in this area need to be considered.

The inaugural White Ribbon Day, held in November 2008, put the spotlight on family violence and the need to speak out about it.

Mr Hulls said at its launch, "It is important that as a community, and as a government, we condemn family violence in our words and in our actions, in our policies and in the way we approach and support family violence victims and perpetrators".

To address this issue, the Victorian government has announced an independent review into family violence deaths.

The review, which will be led by the State Coroner's Office, will investigate such deaths and gather information for future intervention and prevention strategies.

The new Coroner's Prevention Unit will conduct the review as part of its mandate to improve the health and safety of Victorians.

Also, new legislation aims to provide improvements in the way family violence is dealt with by the police and courts.

The Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic) came into operation on 8 December 2008.

Under this Act, police can intervene more quickly to deal with violence and threats within families by issuing family violence safety notices.

Similarly, new laws protecting vulnerable victims by making it easier for them to stay in the family home and requiring the perpetrator to leave, all combine to seek to minimise the effects and occurrence of family violence.