

For immediate release

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURGE: STATE OF ORIGIN GAME LEAVES WOMEN AND CHILDREN BATTERED AND BRUISED**

**22 June 2018:** Public health advocates are calling on the National Rugby League (NRL) to acknowledge and address a dangerous spike in domestic violence against women and children linked to the annual State of Origin series.

Newly released data\* from the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) spanning six years (2012-2017) have revealed a 40.7 per cent average increase in domestic violence and 71.8% in non-domestic assaults across New South Wales on State of Origin game days.

The Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (CAPR) at La Trobe University examined the data set of recorded domestic and non-domestic assaults in NSW on Wednesday nights (between 6pm Wednesday to 6am Thursday) for the weeks around State of Origin games.

The dataset included every Wednesday from two weeks prior to the first game of each series to two weeks after the final game (11 weeks per year). Data from Victoria were included as a quasi-control measure, given the substantially lower interest in rugby league in that state.

CAPR Deputy Director, Dr Michael Livingston said the spike in both domestic and non-domestic violence on State of Origin game night was significant and consistent in NSW across the three-game series in each and every one of the years examined.

“In the twelve-hour window from 6pm to 6am on State of Origin game night, women and children in New South Wales are almost 40 per cent more likely to become victims of domestic Violence. This is a significant and consistent spike across the three-game series in each and every one of the years examined.

“Of note, when we compare those findings with Victoria, a state with less interest in rugby league, the data reveals no statistically significant increase in violent assaults on the dates in question,” Dr Livingston said.

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) Chief Executive, Michael Thorn says it is very apparent that the State of Origin games are driving an increase in domestic violence (including alcohol-related domestic violence) in NSW.

“It’s crystal clear that the State of Origin fixtures are leading to a surge in domestic violence. It’s happening on the National Rugby League’s watch and women and children are being harmed as a direct consequence of these games,” Mr Thorn said.



Mr Thorn says that an increase in domestic violence associated with a sporting fixture is not new, pointing to the increase in domestic violence experienced in England during the 2010 World Cup.

“The drivers of domestic violence are complex and many, however, the disturbing findings released today suggest the State of Origin’s particular celebration of heavy drinking, masculinity, tribalism, and the toxic level of aggressive alcohol promotion have collided in such a way as to encourage drinking to excess and domestic violence,” Mr Thorn said.

FARE Research Manager, Dr Melanie Pescud agrees that that link between domestic violence and State of Origin games is indisputable, and has called on the NRL to tackle the issue head-on.

“We are calling on the State of Origin to tackle its domestic violence association head on. We acknowledge that there is no magic answer to eradicating domestic violence, but with the knowledge that the State of Origin series is responsible for such a significant surge in domestic violence on the night of each game, the onus is on the NRL to acknowledge the data and outline what measures it will take, both to reduce this violence and to educate and protect the women and children of New South Wales on State of Origin game night,” Dr Pescud said.

Dr Pescud said that some immediate measures, such as alcohol’s prominence in the NRL, should be addressed by the sporting code.

“With half of all reported DV incidents in Australia involving alcohol, the saturation of alcohol sponsorship in the Origin series and the NRL more broadly is something the code must address,” Dr Pescud said.

Dr Pescud said that while FARE will continue to advocate for changes to alcohol policy including through its *End Alcohol Advertising in Sport* campaign, the immediate responsibility to address this connection lies with the NRL.

“The NRL must look at ways it can effectively address its connection between the code and domestic violence, and its relationship with alcohol is a good start. The State of Origin series and NRL more broadly has become a battle of toxic masculinity and beer brands – it’s hard to know where the game ends and the violence and alcohol sponsorship begins,” Dr Pescud said.

The National Sexual Assault, Family & Domestic Violence Counselling Line – 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732) – is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for any Australian who has experienced, or is at risk of, family and domestic violence and/or sexual assault.

**Mr Thorn and Dr Pescud are available for interview.**

*\*Issue originally identified by NSLHD Health Promotion for the Tackling Violence program.*

**Media contact:**

Jeremy Henderson      0425 559 710