

Women wary on shaming

- Malcolm Brown
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THE Premier's plan to "name and shame" the perpetrators of domestic violence has run into immediate opposition - not from men, but women.

If a violent husband is named and humiliated publicly, few may have sympathy for him. But his battered wife and their children would be named - and shamed - at the same time, critics say.

Morris Iemma announced yesterday there would be a new law for a "specific new offence" of domestic violence. He said "offenders will no longer be able to hide behind assault charges" and, if convicted, would be exposed as "the cowards they are".

But the Women's Electoral Lobby branded this as a "simplistic and sensationalist" response to a complex problem.

"Often women have spent years concealing the violence in their lives, and as a result of that violence in their relationships they often suffer from very low esteem," said the lobby's spokeswoman, Sarah Maddison.

"The prospect of that very private aspect of their lives becoming part of a naming and shaming circus would be a deterrent for many to come forward."

Then there is the humiliation in the schoolyard. "Children in these situations have probably already endured extremely difficult home circumstances and probably without exception have developed coping strategies and mechanisms that have involved keeping that part of their lives secret. It is up to them to reveal that aspect of their lives, in a supported environment, not on the evening news."

She added: "In other cases, such as sexual assault, the perpetrators are often not named. I think this naming and shaming needs to be thought through."

Mr Iemma told Labor's election launch yesterday: "Domestic violence is a scourge of society which destroys families and creates a deadly legacy for the next generation.

"This [prosecuting under the new law] is a clear message to perpetrators that they will face the full force of the law."

Mr Iemma said there would be new domestic violence "hot spot teams" in a new police family and domestic violence unit, with 35 officers "targeting thugs who assault their families". Five officers would be assigned to deal with repeat offenders.

He said these measures would build on a \$28 million, four-year plan announced in November last year, which was designed to improve support for victims of domestic violence.

The Premier's office later said there was no plan to change the laws that stop the reporting of the names of children who are victims of violence, which would extend to the charge of domestic violence. It had also not been decided what sort of penalties would apply to the domestic violence charge.

Ms Maddison said the number of reported instances of domestic violence had not declined over the decades. Any renewed government attempt to tackle the problem would be welcome.

But she said she did not think there would be much in research literature to suggest the naming and shaming of perpetrators would work. One of the effects would be "invading the privacy of the

survivors".

There were far more significant problems of domestic violence, in particular what happened to a woman and her children once she had decided, often after years of abuse, to leave home. Often such women would have to "scramble round" and wait for government housing.