Little sympathy for Hackett

Former Olympic swimming champion Grant Hackett’s effort to resurrect his reputation with a tearful television interview seemed to have won him little sympathy in the public arena yesterday.

Hackett appeared on Channel 9’s 60 Minutes on Sunday and spoke for the first time about the night last October when he drunkenly trashed his family home in Melbourne, prompting his wife Candice Alley to leave with their young children and call police.

The TV station has also been criticised for keeping the Olympian on its commentary team for next month’s London Games after the incident and the 60 Minutes interview has been seen by many as a bid to win back public favour for Hackett.

Comments on online social media site Twitter flowed thick and fast with a variety of opinions yesterday.

Experts in the fields of alcohol abuse, relationships counselling and family violence said the incident reflected problems in many homes.

McCusker Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth director Mike Daube said Hackett’s account was an example of society’s problem with excessive alcohol consumption and Australian culture needed to change so it became unacceptable, particularly for role models like the former athlete, to be drunk.

“Forty-three per cent of 16 and 17-year-olds say they drink to get drunk, so we absolutely need role models to set a different example,” Professor Daube said.

“This shows the enormous personal impact that alcohol can have on individuals and their families.

“It also shows what a long way we have to go in terms of changing public perception of alcohol.”

Hackett told 60 Minutes he had no problem with alcohol when he was wrecking walls and upturning furniture, including a grand piano, and just wanted an end to his marriage.

“I don’t blame the alcohol,” he said. “I was drunk, I think the alcohol exaggerated or exacerbated the emotions of that night and made it worse,” he said.

Relationships Australia WA chief executive Terri Reilly said a marriage breakdown was no excuse for violent behaviour and urged people to seek professional help before a situation got to the point of rage.

“There is no excuse for violent behaviour,” Ms Reilly said.

“Whatever motivates that behaviour is something really serious.

“When a marriage becomes untenable, it creates enormous hurt and anger that can lead to rage.

“It’s really important that people monitor themselves and their emotional states and seek help before behaving in a destructive way, if not for themselves then for their children.”

Ms Reilly said the effect on children who witnessed a parent losing control could lead to long-term psychological harm.

Margaret Augerinos, from the Australian Women Against Violence Alliance, said violence against women was not a private matter and was not restricted to physical and sexual abuse.

“Men like Grant Hackett who are public figures and role models need to recognise that their behaviour is abusive and must change,” Ms Augerinos said.

Hackett described the incident as “one mistake” and said he hoped the Australian public could forgive him.

“I will be defined by my actions moving forward,” he said. “I hope people take the time to judge me on that. I’m very, very determined to turn that around.”

‘The alcohol exacerbated the emotions of that night.’

Grant Hackett
Mia Freedman @MiaFreedman
I feel uncomfortable about disgraced male celebs given a platform to redeem themselves while their partners stay silent.

Meredith @mezosaurus
Err.. can we STOP making domestic violence jokes re: Grant Hackett please? There's nothing funny about the situation in the slightest.

Christine McDougall @christine_mcd
If you have NEVER raised your voice in sheer frustration towards a loved one, then feel free to judge Grant Hackett.

Dr Darren Saunders @whereisdaz
"You do not have to hit someone to threaten them”.

Kat Anderson @kjourno
I get Chan9 protecting their brand, but #Hackett's “embarrassment” doesn't change his rampages.

White Ribbon NZ @WhiteRibbonNZ
Grant Hackett is 'embarrassed'. But is he sorry?

Tom Steinfort @tomsteinfort
While I obviously don't know the details ... Grant Hackett is one of the nicest people I've worked with.

Young couple: Grant Hackett and Candice Alley in 2008. Picture: AAP